



Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools

The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue

An Instruction issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that MACS offices and Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are situated on the lands of the five language groups that make up the Kulin Nation, who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge their continued deep spiritual connection and relationship to Country.

We pay respects to their Elders past, present and future, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.



School Advisory Councils

Formation for mission is a process that is:

- systematic,
- collaborative,
- graduated and
- ongoing.

Formation for School Advisory Councils supports their roles in:

- articulating and enacting the school's vision and mission.
- promoting the school's Catholic ethos and culture.
- promoting faith formation and development.



Key Principles

- This process holds itself within relationships built on accompaniment centred on the self, others, creation and God.
- Catholic educators need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6)
- [Educating Together in Catholic Schools](#)
#25





Formation for mission in Catholic education:

1. Is “formation of the heart” that is characterised by prayerfulness and reflection.
2. Is respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants’ personal story and everyday reality.
3. Is explicitly Christological, scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded.
4. Has an affective focus on a person’s faith journey and discipleship.
5. Has substantive theological content.
6. Sets out to build communal Catholic religious identity and culture.
7. Is differentiated according to individual and community needs.
8. Promotes personal vocation, connection with the Catholic tradition and responsiveness to mission.
9. Develops the willingness, confidence and capacities of participants in their roles to serve the evangelising mission of Catholic school education.

[A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education](#): p14





Prayer

Leader:

Modelled by parents, principals and teachers, in prayer and with wisdom, through witness and by example, Catholic schooling is at the service of the integral human formation of children and young people in Christ. So we pray:

All:

God, you have made the heavens and the earth. You have revealed your beauty in creation and inspired the gospel from which we proclaim your truth. Please help us now as we read, share and speak together. Take us deeper into understanding more about you and your love for us.

Amen



The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue

On 25 January 2022, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued an *Instruction on The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*.

This documents highlights the unique focus and contribution of Catholic education which can provide the “sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people.”



Process:

The *Instruction on The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*'s purpose is to highlight:

- “the need for greater awareness and coherence of the Catholic identity of the Church’s educational institutions worldwide”,
- the collaboration of the whole school community and
- the prevention of “conflicts and divisions in the essential sector of education”.

Each session allows us to work through 3 stages:

- **Explore,**
- **Reflect**
- **Respond**





At a glance:

The Vatican's education congregation has published a document responding to conflicts over the interpretation of the concept of "Catholic identity" in Catholic school settings.

It affirmed the importance of a Catholic educational project with an evangelical goal and explained the role that teachers and administrators play in its achievement.

The document said:

"The whole school community is responsible for implementing the school's Catholic educational project as an expression of its ecclesiality and its being a part of the community of the Church... Everyone has the obligation to recognize, respect, and bear witness to the Catholic identity of the school... This applies to the teaching staff, the non-teaching personnel, and the pupils and their families."

The Catholic school's educational project is "clearly inspired by the Gospel".



Explore:

to travel through (an unfamiliar area) in order to learn about it

A key to the *Instruction* is that “In the Catholic school’s educational project there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom.”

The words education and school dominate the text with Catholic qualifying the universal and inalienable right the Church sees the formation of the human person to be.

Focus:

“so that, wherever possible, Catholic schools be established and fostered with the utmost care”.

How is the Church’s value of education in general reflected in the *Instruction*?





Explore: Education is a universal and inalienable right

1. The Meaning of the Universal Right to an Education

All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education (5) that is in keeping with their ultimate goal,(6) their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.

5. The Importance of Schools

Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance.(19) It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life. Between pupils of different talents and backgrounds it promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding; and it establishes as it were a center whose work and progress must be shared together by families, teachers, associations of various types that foster cultural, civic, and religious life, as well as by civil society and the entire human community.

Consider the set of “fundamental principles” in the Vatican Council’s declaration [Gravissimum educationis](#)

How are the ideas and information connected to what you already knew?

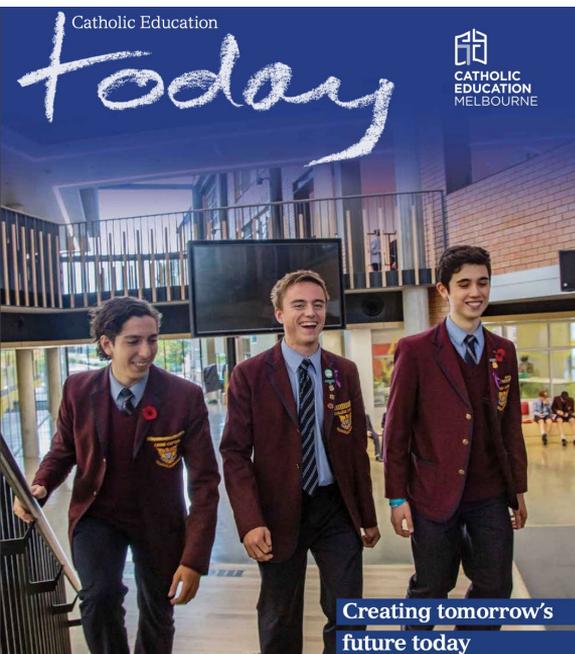
What new ideas did you get that broadened your thinking or extended it in different directions?

What challenges emerge for you?

What’s missing?



Explore: the Catholic qualification



See: Look closely at the representations. What do you notice?

Make any observations



Explore: the Catholic qualification

See

Look closely at the representations. What do you notice? Make any observations

Choose and share a lens

Think about how you see the world. What lens you see the world through?

Our lenses could be related to your identities, positions or backgrounds. For example: gender, race, ethnicity, age, culture, place, occupation, family role, work role, and more.

With a partner or small group each choose one lens and take turns talking about the diagram through that lens.

Probe

Ask a question of your partner to understand more about another person's lens and perspective. You can start with:

- Say more about what you mean by ...
- Tell me more about why you think/feel/see ...

Reflect

Take a minute or two to look again at the diagram do you have any new observations or questions? What issues or themes did you lenses conversation invite you to think about?



Reflect:

to bend back light from a surface

16. As far as Catholic schools are concerned, the conciliar declaration represents a turning point, since, in line with the ecclesiology of [*Lumen Gentium*](#), it considers the school not so much as an institution but as a community. The characteristic element of the Catholic school, in addition to pursuing “cultural goals and the human formation of youth”, consists in creating “for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity”.

Focus:

What does Catholic + education = ?



Reflect: Community - the Catholic qualification

A reading from Romans 12:1-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.





Reflect: Community - the Catholic qualification

Key quotes

creating “for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity – GE#8

in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
– Romans 12:1-8

Catholic identity should be a *place of encounter*, a tool promoting the convergence of ideas and actions. – ICS#84

Reflect

Silently:

How does the word ‘Catholic’ modify the noun ‘education’? What certain quality does it attribute to our understanding of ‘education’?

- How is this lived out in my community?
- How can I encourage others to be in touch with this aspect of Catholic education?

Share:

Each member in turn articulates one quality of ‘Catholic’ education that transforms ‘education’.

“Catholic education brings the gift of to our school community.”



Respond: to say something in return

Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”

The basic problem lies in the concrete application of the term “Catholic”, a complex word that is not easily expressed by means of exclusively legal, formal and doctrinal criteria.

The causes of tensions are mainly the result on the one hand of a reductive or purely formal interpretation, and on the other of a vague or narrow understanding of Catholic identity.

Focus:

Encountering different perspectives become a resource and a foundational principle for the development of methodologies suitable to solve possible critical issues and find shared solutions.

Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”

68. The basic problem lies in the concrete application of the term “Catholic”, a complex word that is not easily expressed by means of exclusively legal, formal and doctrinal criteria. The causes of tensions are mainly the result on the one hand of a reductive or purely formal interpretation, and on the other of a vague or narrow understanding of Catholic identity.

Reductive view

69. The specific charism with which Catholic identity is lived out does not justify a *reductive interpretation* of catholicity that explicitly or *de facto* excludes essential principles, dimensions and requirements of the Catholic faith. Moreover, catholicity cannot be attributed only to certain spheres or to certain persons, such as liturgical, spiritual or social occasions, or to the function of the school chaplain, religion teachers or the school headmaster. This would contradict the responsibility of the school community as a whole and of each of its members^[78]. Moreover, by underscoring this responsibility we do not intend to introduce a “perfectly egalitarian society”, nor any moral or disciplinary perfectionism that would be hard to judge.

Formal or charismatic view

70. According to a *formal interpretation*, Catholic identity is expressed through a “Decree” issued by the competent ecclesiastical authority, which grants legal status, recognises property and governance according to canonical norms, also granting the possibility of civil legal status in the State where the institution is established. This identity is guaranteed by means of control and certification by the competent ecclesiastical authority, with the possibility of appealing to the Holy See in the event of conflict.



Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”

71. In addition to the definitions of exclusively juridical nature, there are others according to which what counts above all is the “Catholic spirit”, the “Christian inspiration” or the “*charismatic*” fulfillment, terms which are poorly defined, hardly concrete and seldom verifiable in reality. According to these interpretations, neither the application of canonical norms nor the recognition of legitimate hierarchical authority are considered necessary. If this were to be the case, it would only be of “symbolic” value and therefore hardly effective. Sometimes, in the case of educational institutions established and/or directed by Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life, Societies of Apostolic Life or charismatic groups, there is an imbalance between the charism and ecclesial belonging. In some situations, any reference to the term “Catholic” is avoided, choosing alternative juridical terminology.

“Narrow” view

72. Another reason for conflicting interpretations is represented by the “*narrow*” Catholic school model. In such schools there is no room for those who are not “totally” Catholic. This approach contradicts the vision of an “open” Catholic school that intends to apply to the educational sphere the model of a “Church which goes forth”^[79], in dialogue with everyone. We must not lose our missionary impetus to confine ourselves on an island, and at the same time we need the courage to bear witness to a Catholic “culture”, that is, universal, cultivating a healthy awareness of our own Christian identity.





Respond: Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”

Key Concepts

The causes of tensions

Reductive view

Formal or exclusively juridical view

Charismatic view

Narrow view

To to consolidate Catholic identity ICS# 84 calls for *a place of encounter*. Catholic identity should be a *place of encounter*, a tool promoting the convergence of ideas and actions.

Considering clause 68 - 72 on the ***Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”***:

1. Do these view resonate with you?
2. Where do you think our *place of encounter* is?
3. What do you see that makes you say that?
4. John XXIII statement on responses to divergence was “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity”. What does this mean for our discussions around identity?

Remind participants that ICS# 84 calls for *a place of encounter*. Have them write a response using each of the sentence stems:

I used to think...

Now, I think...





In conclusion

Each session of formation builds on the past and has a context ahead, so each aspect or session builds into the next. This reflective, developmental process enables participants to apply the experience to their everyday life and their ministry in Catholic education.

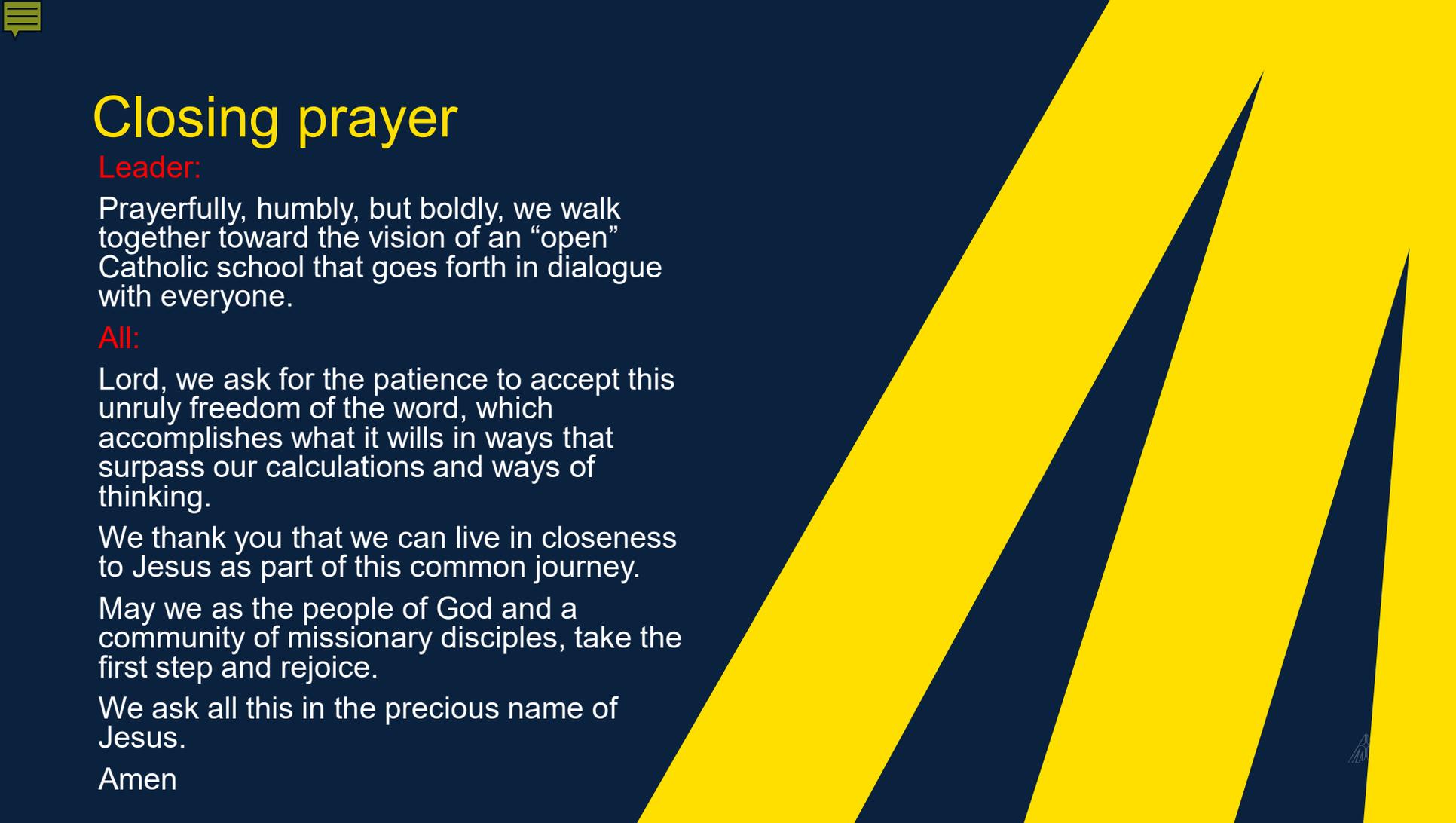




The context ahead

- How can the reflective, developmental process (explore, reflect and respond) impact on the experience of your everyday life and your ministry in Catholic education?
- What will you take away?
- What action can we take as a next step to bringing the mission to life?
- Commit to something today that builds on the experience you shared here today.





Closing prayer

Leader:

Prayerfully, humbly, but boldly, we walk together toward the vision of an “open” Catholic school that goes forth in dialogue with everyone.

All:

Lord, we ask for the patience to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.

We thank you that we can live in closeness to Jesus as part of this common journey.

May we as the people of God and a community of missionary disciples, take the first step and rejoice.

We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen



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