



Tasmanian Catholic Schools Parents and Friends Federation

TCSPFF VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is that parents of children in Catholic Schools be full partners in delivering quality Catholic education

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TRIANGLE NEWSLETTER MARCH 2008

Welcome to another edition of our newsletter. This year will see the Federation consolidate its work at a national level and begin to support more work at the grass roots of the organisation. The major focus of our work will revolve around showcasing how some school P&Fs effectively engage in their school community.

As a collective, Catholic school parents and friends have an incredible amount of experience to draw on. To help share this knowledge, the Federation has set up a forum to allow anyone who wishes to ask a question or respond to an inquiry to have the opportunity to do this in a public forum. Many parents and friends complain that they feel isolated. It is hoped this forum will allow us to become aware that we are members of a wider Catholic Tasmanian school community that often has the same issues. Please take the time to visit and register at

www.tasmaniancatholicchoolparents.freeforums.org

May 2008 see your children continue to grow in their faith and love of life. It is with these gifts that they can only but succeed.

Damian von Samorzewski

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

St Peter Chanel, Smithton

12 & 13 April 2008

AWAKEN THE GIANT WITHIN

Engaging parents through effective partnerships.

This year's conference will be about sharing and showcasing what different P&Fs are doing to engage parents and friends within their school communities. All P&Fs struggle with involvement (or so they think!) and it is hoped that the P&Fs that do things differently will share their secrets at this year's conference.

Many P&Fs struggle with identity. That is, they are mainly associated with fundraising. The reality is, anything in a school community that a parent or friend does should be associated with the work of the school's P&F. Be it listening to kids reading, helping out in the school canteen, coaching sporting teams, going on excursions or working within a literacy support program. In reality, these can all be seen as the work of Parents and Friends.

As the new year starts, why not use this as the perfect opportunity to think about how you can use your skills to support your local P&F, be it directly or indirectly. Experience is not necessary, only a passion to want to support others reach their potential.

IN THIS ISSUE

Exploitation of teachers – It's our call

Restorative Justice - More than just words

Catholic Social Teaching

Tasmanian review into Student Transport

.....school funding report

2008 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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ALL WELCOME

Contact / email the office for registration details

"When God is no longer at the centre of human life, then life itself becomes empty and meaningless"

John Paul II *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 37

We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

CATHOLIC SCHOOL STAFF EXPLOITATION

As the world becomes more and more competitive - globally, we as parents expect more from our Catholic schools (Bidwell 1965) and in particular our teachers, in preparing our children for this new world. The problem is, the resources to provide these 'wants' from our schools are finite. That is, unless we (or the government) fund our raised expectations, we will continue to expect Catholic School staff to fund this through their goodwill. This goodwill usually results in our school staff being exploited, intentionally or otherwise. Our, or our school's reputation drives this exploitation, whether we realise it or not. Proof of this recent phenomenon is the research finding of the University of New England and Australian Catholic University,

[<http://www.cathnews.com/news/707/101.php>] who previously found 97.5 per cent of Catholic school teachers had experienced bullying in the workplace. I would hazard to guess that much of this bullying was due to our raised expectations of what our teachers 'need' to do to help our children succeed in the 21st Century (Smyth, J. 2001).

So what do we do as Catholic school parents? This is very difficult, for what is generally at fault is the culture of the school. 'Success at all costs' could be the motto of many of our schools and colleges. Parents drive this culture and when we do nothing to address these issues, we all but condone the continuation of our school staffs' exploitation. We need to reflect and respond to what Pope Leo XIII said in *Rerum Novarum*, (published in 1891) "Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that the working man has been surrendered, all isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition."

We need to redefine what is possible with the resources we have at hand. If we only have one teacher for 32 students, of which 15 % have a range of learning disabilities, than commonsense should tell us that this teacher would need to work well above the employment conditions to get even satisfactory results for most of the class. Are we as parents putting our heads in the sand? Is it easier to condone than to confront the real issues? Do we merrily go on our way, hoping that this teacher will have access to a miracle or two, or do we complain at the first opportunity when this exploited teacher 'doesn't pull their weight'?

Perhaps it is time to stand up for our teachers and demand FOR them and not from them. We need to send a clear message to our politicians that they need to fund education in Australia comparable to the top OECD countries. We also need to reflect on what we expect from our teachers. In real terms, their employment conditions have been reduced substantially from the 1960's. Top level teachers are paid 40% LESS than what they were in the 1960's in real terms. Is it any wonder that our top students leave school and never want to return as the next generation's teachers? Is it any wonder, one in five new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career?

So as we start the 2008 school year, let us think about what we can do for our teachers and not what they can do for us.....

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

At last year's conference **Terry O'Connell** OAM, spoke about the Restorative Justice approach to supporting our children develop social and moral responsibility. He was in Tasmania as a guest of southern Tasmanian Catholic schools and to provide staff professional development in this important area. Why is this process better than the punitive approach to behaviour management? Hopefully the following will help you understand.

"Suspension typically put our most venerable students at further risk, Often times the behaviour that caused the suspension is the result of poor social and emotional support. These students are already enmeshed in unresolved conflict and alienation in the family at school. Yet schools are willing to cast them out again. When we do take these students back, suspended students are more likely to re-offend and disrupt class, because the root cause has not been address. Thus, the cycle is perpetuated, laying the foundation that establishes the school house to jail house track.

These students have a story to tell us, as do the students (& staff) who were bullied. Through listening to their respective stories in an environment that sanctions the value of social relationships, these students are more likely to take on measures of responsibilities and self-control. 'What emerges from the research literature [on suspensions] is the importance of valuing all perspectives of a suspension situation because it is not just individual deficits but relationships dynamics and social environments that shape behaviour". Restoring Safe School Communities Morrison, B. [2007] Page 180

The old adage, **'It takes a whole village to raise a child'** has never been so true. Why then, do we sometimes 'deal' with these types of issues by doing the opposite of what Jesus taught us?

Bad boys need help, not bans.

Suspension is not the answer when it comes to disciplining boys with behaviour problems, claims consultant behaviourist, Dr Julia Tilling. She said that rather than sending troublesome students away to external suspension programs, schools could achieve better results if they set up programs allowing students to remain in a supportive environment with mentors. 'Often when a student returns to the school (after suspension), the school hasn't changed, the curriculum hasn't adapted and so they are basically being thrown back in the same environment that they were struggling with originally' she said. *First published, Australian Educational Leader, Vol 29, #4 2007, pg 3*

SPENDING YOUR P&F FUNDS WISELY

MORE BOOKS IN CLASSROOMS = HIGHER LITERACY RATES

Recent research commissioned the Australian School Library Association shows that **school libraries can have a positive impact** on a range of learning areas, including reading scores, literacy, and broader learning.

"The **research has also shown that collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and teacher librarians have a significant impact on learning**, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers," Dr Lonsdale said.

In addition, there is evidence to show that:

- a strong computer network connecting the school library's resources to the classroom and laboratories has an impact on student achievement;
- a print-rich environment leads to more reading and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and writing style;
- the extent to which books are borrowed from school libraries shows a strong relationship with reading achievement while borrowing from classroom libraries does not;
- integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information seeking skills;
- a positive difference can be made to student achievement when school libraries co-operate with public libraries; and
- school libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regards to their own learning.

Source http://www.acer.edu.au/enews/0306_School_libraries.html

Of course books alone will not help your children to read. Seeing mum and dad reading (and not just the TV guide!) for enjoyment OR learning is critical, as is actually finding some time to read with your children, EVERYDAY!

DEFINING FEATURES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

This document arises from a research project authorized by the Queensland Bishops and is a foundational document that captures the essential characteristics of Catholic Schools in Queensland in this millennium. View it at http://www.ceo.cairns.catholic.edu.au/about_us/defining_features.html

A REPORT INTO AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS FUNDING SYSTEM

Australian governments spend over \$30 billion on primary and secondary schools each year. Yet the process of school funding, including the way in which amounts are calculated, distributed and reported upon, is unavailable not only to the wider public but to some extent even to those working in education. Although Australia's total spending on schools is small by international standards (given the size of its population), it is significant enough to warrant a more transparent process.

Accountability, comparability and transparency are challenging school systems in a wide range of areas. Collecting data on school attendance and making it comparable across states; establishing a national curriculum; creating a national testing regime; evaluating teachers against nationally agreed standards – all vary in their complexity but all are motivated by a single philosophy; namely, that education should be made more transparent in order to hold those responsible for it accountable thereby ultimately improving the service.

See full report @

http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PolicyBriefs_Dowling07.pdf

Perhaps an easy way out of this funding mess is to copy the New Zealand education model. New Zealand's Catholic schools are part of the country's integrated education system. There is one bureaucracy that manages all New Zealand's State and Catholic schools. *"Integrated Schools are schools within the State system of education which have a special character. This is normally of a religious nature or one which reflects a particular educational philosophy.* See <http://www.nzceo.catholic.org.nz/pages/aboutus.html> or email the State Secretary for a podcast on this issue.

2008 Southern Region Meetings

Dates for 2008 meetings 5 Mar, 14 May, 2 July, 8 Oct, 28 Nov (AGM) – Garth Cornelius (President), Michael Hangan, (Secretary, South Region State Vice President)

For more information please contact Michael Hangan Mob: 0438 243 533

Maths Websites

Online Australian graded assessments <http://www.mathspower.com.au/2004/Assessments/>

<http://www.numeracyworld.com/>

<http://www.mathletics.com.au/>

<http://www.amathsdictionaryforkids.com/>

<http://www.rainforestmaths.com/>

EDUCATIONAL SNIPPETS

"The trouble is that so many schools are out of their time – disorientated and confused. They are compliant offspring of the Industrial Age, the era of mass production which fuelled the industrial economy of the past. In the schools which served this era, predictability and standardization were highly valued".
Whitby, G. 2007 Executive Director,
Catholic Education Office, Parramatta NSW

"Catholic schools have grown more complex, but at their heart lies a great and simple truth. They are above all to be schools of holiness. They exist primarily to give saints to the world."
John Paul II , Millennial message to Australian Catholic School Students 17 March 2000

" Many parents are saying they do not feel welcome and comfortable in their children's schools...
"...many parents felt excluded, uncomfortable, ill-informed in respect to school goals and practices. They also indicated a common attitude amongst many schools that parents had no role to play in school education."

Australian Parents Council Review No.3 2006 quoting joint research by APC and ACSSO

"Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring"

"they are the primary and principal educators."

"The family which has the primary duty of imparting education needs help of the whole community.... according to the principle of subsidiarity..."

" GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS"
POPE PAUL VI 28 OCTOBER 1965

Canon Law 796 #1. ...schools are the principal **assistance** to parents in fulfilling the function of education.

WHAT IS CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING?

In this last Triangle I spoke about Catholic Social Teaching (also known as Catholic Social Doctrine). I wrote about three of the six main themes to SJT. Below are the remaining three.

Universal Destination Of Goods

The universal destination of goods refers to the fact that God intended the goods of creation for the use of all. Everyone has the right to access the goods of creation to meet their needs. People and nations have no right to squander resources when others are in need.

The key question here is: "does everyone have access to a large enough share of resources to meet their needs?"

Participation

Because of their intelligence and free will, people have both a right and a duty to participate in those decisions that most directly affect them. They are actively to shape their own destiny rather than simply accept the decisions of others.

This right to participate belongs not only to individuals but also to groups and communities.

One way to reflect on participation is to ask: who wins? Who loses? Who decides?

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity places responsibility as close as possible to the grassroots. The people or groups most directly affected by a decision or policy should have a key decision-making role. They should only be interfered with in order to support them in cases of need, and to help coordinate their activities with the activities of the rest of society with a view to the common good.

As the world changes and we become busier in our own lives, it is often easier to allow the current status – quo to remain and allow others to dictate our future. As Social Justice Doctrine teaches us, not only do we have a right, but also an obligation to ensure we work together to continue our life's Mission.

As we begin our work with others in Tasmanian Catholic Education for another year, it would be wise to reflect on the six themes of Social Justice Teaching. **Human Dignity & the Unity of the Human Family, Solidarity, The Common Good, Universal Destination Of Goods, Participation & Subsidiarity.** These themes provide guidance and support for the work that we do in Tasmanian Catholic schools.

Source <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

The March 2008 Triangle Newsletter content has been sourced and compiled by

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"Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:17

The views expressed in this newsletter are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Tasmanian Catholic Schools Parents and Friends Federation.

**The more you read,
The more you know,
The more you know,
The smarter you grow,
The smarter you grow,
The stronger your voice,
The stronger your voice,
When speaking your mind or
Making your choice!**

