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**The Catholic School Parish Nexus: A Case Study**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Education**

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# ABSTRACT

The study recorded in this thesis sought to gain initial baseline information about the purpose of the Catholic schools, from the perspective of those who lead Catholic schools and from the perspective of those who lead parishes in the diocese of Townsville.

The study is perhaps the first step in beginning to ask whether a nineteenth century decision about Catholic schools as "the best sociological conditions for the religious socialization of the young is...necessarily the best twentieth century solution" (Leavey, 1993, p9). To address that issue three key questions need to be answered. Firstly, for whom do our Catholic schools exist in the 1990s? Second, what do we want our Catholic schools to be doing for those entrusted to them - or what criteria do we use to measure their effectiveness? Thirdly, what is the relationship of the school to the local church community - is it valid to call Catholic schools "faith communities" in their own right?

As the study is concerned with the perceptions of parish leadership and school leadership in a particular diocese a case study method was chosen. The study sought information in three areas:

1. The perceived purposes of the Catholic school today
2. The changing role of the Catholic school today and its relationship to parish
3. The changing evangelising role of parish and school

The study concluded that Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville provide the only experience of church for most of their students and indeed for many, if not most of their families. But it is a transient experience for there is little attempt to link the school faith community with parish or any other external faith community. Parents appear to be struggling with their role as primary educators in handing on the faith and are seeking much more from schools in this regard. Both parish and schools are operating quite independently with each intent on establishing their own faith community.

The research also highlighted that allegiances to parish have changed. The data indicate that less than 20% regularly attend Sunday Eucharist and both parish leadership and school leadership recognise that many families avail themselves of the many services now offered through the schools. While the smaller, country parishes still appear to have some relevance and some sense of community, larger towns or city parishes appear to define community quite differently. The research also highlighted the paucity of dialogue between those who lead schools and parishes in the Diocese and this has contributed to the lack of clarity about the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling today. In reality many pastors' expectations of schools had changed little and the traditional criteria for success (attendance at Mass, involvement in parish, reception of sacraments) were still applied. Catholic school leadership teams were also struggling with defining the nature of purpose of Catholic schools, particularly in the light of the changing expectations of parents who enroll their students in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are now the only experience of church for so many students was clearly recognised. The additional responsibility this places on school leadership and on the faith witness of teachers was also recognised by all involved in the research as a critical issue.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not contain without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree at any University nor being currently submitted for any other degree; and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not include any material previously published or written by another person without due reference made in the text.

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James F Quillinan

Date:

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The study has involved many people. I thank them for their interest, encouragement and in particular for challenging me to rethink or defend many of the tentative conclusions I reached at various times throughout the study.

I fear that the findings may suggest that those involved in Catholic Education in the Diocese of Townsville are a pessimistic lot! Such would be far from reality. Their optimism and enthusiasm is almost tangible.

I could not have completed the study without the support and encouragement of my wife Mary and my five children who read and reread the drafts and asked so many questions.

I thank all those involved in the research for their generosity not only with their time and their desire to be involved, but for the courage and vision they show each day.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Background

The Australian Catholic Bishops' decision in 1869 to establish an alternative school system was both courageous and far reaching. For those founding Bishops the free, secular and compulsory education offered by the various State Governments was fundamentally flawed in that it lacked one of the essentials of 'real' education - a spiritual dimension. In 1869 the New South Wales' Bishops condemned public schools because they lacked this essential element and thus they contravened the first principles of Christian education. They had little hesitation, therefore, in describing those schools as "seed plots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness, being calculated to debase the standard of human excellence and to corrupt the political, social and individual life of the future citizens" (Campion, 1982, p.67).

The Bishops' stand against what they saw in education as "rampant and aggressive secularism" (Collins, 1991, p.107) was given further impetus in the earliest Papal encyclical to address the nature of education, *Divini Illius Magistri*

In fact, since education consists essentially in preparing man (sic) for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to obtain the sublime goal for which he was created, it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end....(*Divini Illius Magistri*, 1929, para.26)

Thus the Bishops believed that Catholic education should promote the ultimate purpose of human existence, eternal salvation. One Christian Brother, at the opening of Brothers' school at Balmain, encapsulated the Bishops' stance in these terms

Our main endeavour shall ever be to teach our pupils to value above all things their eternal salvation and to receive this by faithfully and steadfastly adhering to the faith of their fathers (Br H.B. O'Hagan, cited in Campion, 1982, p.68).

The Bishops envisioned a network of Catholic schools which would be infused with a religious atmosphere. That atmosphere would enable a spiritual dimension to permeate all aspects of school life (Collins, 1988, p.68). Catholic schools would thus teach, nurture and hand on the Catholic faith in close partnership with parents and parish.

### 1.2 The Growth of Catholic Education

The Catholic education system which grew rapidly across Australia was a very cohesive structure with its roots in Irish Catholic culture. Until recently Australian Catholics had as their image of church a local geographical Parish. The Catholic school was the focus of much, if not most of the parish activity - in fact

it was the chief mission of that parish (Queensland Catholic Education Centre, 1982 p.2). Pressure to send Catholic children to Catholic schools was intense. Religious practice in the home was strong and Sunday Mass attendance was indeed compulsory! Quite clearly the Bishops' decision paid off - the churches were crowded at five, six or seven Sunday Masses. New seminaries and novitiates were built to cater for the ever increasing number of new applicants who were signing up to join the many Irish religious men and women who had responded to the Bishops' invitations to staff the schools. The Catholic Church was alive and well, due in no small measure to the Catholic schools and the religious men and women who taught in them. In so many ways for the Australian Catholic "a Catholic world was created for the children to grow up in" (Purnell, 1985, p.120).

### 1.3 Changing Circumstances

The traditional rationale which sustained and informed the existence of the Catholic school has changed dramatically. The Second Vatican Council heralded a new vision of Church and a new vision for the Church. Many found a painful struggle between unchangeable dogma and Newman's concept of the Church as being "involved in a dynamic evolution which carries it forward to its final perfection" (Cave, 1972, p71). The Council espoused a new vision for Catholic schools (*Decree on Christian Education*, 1966, para 8). Moreover, a series of other Roman and local documents followed. To put it bluntly, the theology of the Catholic Church is now much more concerned about "the joy and hope, the grief and anxiety of the men (sic) of our time" (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, para 1*) that is, contemporary life rather than the after life. Pope John Paul II in his address to the Australian Bishops outlined this vision:

In these (Catholic) schools, pupils are taught that the realities of this world and life in Christ are inextricably linked: in Christ the whole cosmos receives its fullest meaning (*L'Osservatore Romano*, May 23rd 1993)

In a recent radio address Archbishop Peter Hollingworth urged the Christian Churches to address not simply the decline in numbers of those who regularly attend their churches but the decline of the influence of the churches in the decision making of the nation. The Catholic Church shares in that decline in numbers and in influence. Some would suggest that Catholic schools should bear much of the blame (Gilchrist, 1986). Such analyses are simplistic and basically flawed as they do not address the vast changes in society and in the Church itself. The Irishness of the Church and the feeling of being an oppressed minority against a hostile world no longer exists (Crawford & Rossiter, 1986, p.6). Australia has become home for literally millions of people of other cultures and other faiths, and many of these students attend Catholic schools. Catholic schools are no longer staffed by religious priests, brothers and nuns (Collins, 1991, p.109). Parish structures are in decline as is the influence of the family. If many of the traditional hallmarks used to determine the success of the Catholic schools are applied today, a radically different picture emerges. A 1995 discussion paper produced by the Brisbane Catholic Education Office suggests that:



weekly celebration of the eucharist in the Australian population at large is around 20%. Many staff and parents associated with today's Catholic schools would not have regular association with parish faith communities. For some, perhaps many, the Church is marginal to their daily and weekly concerns. For many parents, staff and students, ecclesial and eucharistic realities are associated with Catholic schools rather than with parish or diocese. (*Towards an understanding of eucharist in the context of the Catholic school*", 1995, p.2)

The paper notes that Catholic primary schools, because of their close proximity to the parish church and the relatively easy access to parish clergy and to sacramental celebrations make many praiseworthy efforts to nurture student faith and "give them positive and meaningful experiences of Catholicism, including its ecclesial and eucharistic dimensions" (p.2). But the situation in secondary schools is quite different.

Most Catholic secondary schools, because of their regional character, tend to have a remote relationship with parishes and parish clergy. Catholic secondary schools may experience difficulty in having access to suitable clergy for eucharistic and other sacramental celebrations. Adolescent students tend to be more psychologically alienated from institutional church than their pre-adolescent counterparts. Significant numbers of adolescent students who were church attenders in the pre-adolescent years drift away from regular church attendance in their teens. (*Towards an understanding of eucharist in the context of the Catholic school*", 1995, p.2)

Marcellin Flynn's recent study *The Culture of Catholic Schools* supports much of the material contained in this discussion paper. His research notes a fall in year 12 students attendance at Mass from 69% in 1972 to 38% in 1990 (Flynn, 1992, p.111). In 1972 83% of students said that their parents expected them to attend Mass while in 1990 this parental expectation had dropped to 53% (Flynn, 1992, p.298). Of the six thousand year 11 and 12 students surveyed by Flynn only 29% thought it important "to be a practising member of the Catholic Church" (Flynn, p.103) and only 34% said they "feel at home in the Church" (Flynn, p.311).

Flynn's research also indicates that while the culture of Catholic schools still has a significant religious influence on students, there has been a steady decline in the level of students' religious values and practice over the past two decades. Flynn also notes that there has been a steady decline in the religious influence of teachers on students and in the religious influence of student's homes. In fact, "student understanding of Catholicism and its language appear to be in decline in recent times" (Flynn, 1992, p.312).

Further research indicates that attendance at weekly Mass has dropped further to around 20%.

#### **1.4 Changing Parish Structures**

The traditional Parish structures are changing radically. In the Diocese of Townsville, nineteen priests are available to serve thirty parishes. Many communities have Sunday Eucharist only monthly. Quite often no priest is available for funerals or baptisms.

Local anecdotal evidence is also suggesting that the parish is not a reality in the lives of students and that for most students, the school is their only experience of Church. Parish Pastoral leaders as well as school leaders often remark on how regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist has fallen overall. Young people and school students are perhaps more noticeable in their absence. Sunday Mass attendance is but one indicator of involvement in Church.

### **1.5 Changes in Schools**

Over the past three years, at various educational conferences and meetings, school leadership teams voiced a number of observations about contemporary Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville. Some of these issues include:

- a) The student population of the Catholic school is often made up of students from a strong Catholic background. While some have very fundamentalist beliefs, other students have little or no experience of church, while there are an increasing number of students from other faith denominations.
- b) The profile of staff has also changed. There are now very few religious. Most new graduates entering schools are not from Catholic universities. They have no formal Religious Education and rely very heavily on their own childhood experience of Religious Education and formation.
- c) Schools are experiencing added pressures and challenges in teaching Religious Education to such a diverse student population and in providing faith experiences for both staff and students. Particular concern is expressed in the secondary arena where schools of the future are planned to be multicampus with students attending TAFE, the Catholic school and the work place.
- d) Many of the principals believe that the Catholic school is the main experience of church for most of their students.
- e) Many principals consider that the school provides services which were once regarded as the responsibility of the parish.

### **1.6 Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of Administration Teams of schools in the Diocese of Townsville concerning the purpose of Catholic education. As the study is concerned with the perceptions of school and parish leadership in a particular diocese, a case study method was adopted. A number of key

issues evolved following a study of the history, the underlying aims and the ethos of the Catholic school system.

Changes are occurring at an extraordinary pace but if change is to be managed and used effectively, then the perceptions of those who currently lead our schools about the nature and purpose of Catholic schools today are informative.

The research issues included the following:

1. The perceived purposes of the Catholic school today
2. The changing role of the Catholic school today and its relationship to Parish
3. The changing evangelising roles of parish and school.

The research involved a survey sent to all schools in the Diocese of Townsville and interviews were conducted with pastoral leaders of most parishes in the Diocese.

### 1.7 Limitations

The researcher is employed as a Religious Education consultant to Catholic schools across the Diocese. Consequently two possible limitations needed to be considered:

1. That the researcher may be too close to the scene, as it were, "becoming too closely involved and lose detachment or assume advocacy roles detrimental to unprejudiced reporting" (Burns, 1994, p.320).
2. That those being interviewed were well known to the researcher and they may or may not speak as they would wish because of that closeness.

Since the researcher cannot help but influence the data (Wilson, 1977, p.249), "research is becoming increasingly recognised as a process whereby subjective and objective knowledge are interwoven and mutually informing" (Spry, 1989, p.101). To address these possible limitations, however, a number of strategies were employed. Questions sent to school administration teams were constructed so that schools could not be identified easily, if at all. Outside assistance was sought to develop the questionnaire and research results were regularly submitted to critical friends not involved in the research project.

Interviews were conducted with pastoral leaders and a conference involving both pastor and school leaders provided an opportunity for both groups to explore and validate the research results. The conference was facilitated by a person not involved in the research or the Diocese. Results of the research were fed back to the participants for comment throughout the year and the Diocesan Education Council and the Council of Priests were kept informed of progress.

"Triangulation" or using multiple sources of data was also employed as part of the research - interview transcripts, questionnaires, notes and lists from the conference allowed the investigation "to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics or real life events"(Burns, 1994, p.313).

# CHAPTER TWO

## CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

### 2.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of some of the main stakeholders in Catholic education today in the Diocese of Townsville in the light of the original vision espoused by the Bishops who established the Catholic school system in Australia.

The original Catholic school system was a very cohesive structure with a close partnership between Bishop, parish priest, religious teachers and the family. It was, in many ways, the core activity of parish life (Queensland Catholic Education Office, 1982, p.5). It was a time where religious practice in the home and at the local church was strong, the expectations of the church authorities and parents were very clear and hence the role of the school needed little if any clarification (p.6).

That vision was espoused again as recently as 1986 when Pope John Paul II visited Australia. He spoke of the parish school as 'the cornerstone' of the pastoral care of Australia's Catholic people, where "the community hands on the timeless message of Jesus Christ to its youngest members" (Campion, 1986, p.126). He added that both primary and secondary schools must work closely with the parish if they are to foster effectively the Christian formation of their pupils. "This is a noble work in which parents, teachers and clergy all cooperate" (p.128).

This description invites further exploration from a Townsville perspective.

### 2.2 The Diocese of Townsville in the 1990s

Townsville was established as a separate diocese in 1930, "deliberately chosen as a proving ground for an Australian born episcopacy, seen by Rome as a place where it was possible to risk an experiment in major change" (Maguire, 1990, p.3). Maguire suggests that perhaps Townsville is being prepared for a similar role again, to be an experimental ground for the next stage in the evolution of the Australian Church.

The poverty of the diocese, its large size and its diminishing number of priests and religious have presented unique opportunities to develop differently and to possibly face key issues and challenges. In the Diocese of Townsville there are thirty parishes. At present 19 priests are available to serve those parishes. Three priests are responsible for the huge area from Charters Towers to the Northern Territory border. These three priests, living hundreds of kilometers apart, have pastoral responsibility for seven parishes. Many communities have Sunday Eucharist only monthly. Quite often no priest is available for funerals or baptisms. For some, this has been a cause for panic. For others it presents new opportunities and challenges.

Old parish boundaries and structures are being reviewed. How, when and why to celebrate Eucharist is being discussed, and by whom! But even more importantly the Diocese is grappling with the question of what being Church means in these circumstances and at this challenging time in its history.

We have to discover ways in which we can be community. As we reflect we may have to let go of some of the structures that have served us so well in the past and devise new practices that will meet our needs in the future. For our Church to be community so that we proclaim Christ we constantly need to look at how we worship, learn, serve, work together, evangelise and shape our parishes (Bishop Benjamin's Pastoral Letter, November 1994)

For Catholic schools this "discovering new ways" represents a major change. In this Diocese a number of families have little or no allegiance to the parish. For many the traditional close link between parish priest and parish school no longer exists because there is no parish priest. For a number of students, especially in secondary school, their time at Catholic schools will be their only experience of church. Unlike those mythical 'good old days' many parents and students no longer 'practise their faith'. Indeed, much has changed since the Bishops' decision to establish this network of schools which were to be so closely linked to the local parish. In reality, where Catholic schools were once a ministry of the local church, in many areas of this Diocese, they appear to have become the ministry of the local church.

### 2.3 The Evolution of Catholic Education

From its very earliest times the Church has had a long tradition of involvement in teaching and in education as it lived out Christ's command to "Go and teach all nations" (Mt 28:19). In Jewish life the role of teacher was important in passing on the traditions, beliefs and practices of the faith. The rabbi or teacher was held in great esteem. The Gospels detail incidents of this reverence for Jesus as 'teacher' (Mt 7:28, Mt 13:3, Jn 3:2). According to the Catholic Bishops of Australia at the end of the nineteenth century, education traditionally was the responsibility of the Church.

From her very beginning, the Church, this holy mother, has caused schools to be erected, wherein children might be instructed in the knowledge of God and divine things, and brought up in fear, love and discipline of the Lord (Fogarty, 1957, p.1)

In fact, towards the end of the Second Century St Clement of Alexandria established a small school for young men in that city to enable students to combine the life of a Christian with the life of a busy citizen. This school was designed to harmonise the faith of the Gospel with secular learning and civilization (Flynn, 1993, p. XI).

That long tradition of harmonizing faith and life played a critical role in causing the Catholic Bishops of Australia to establish a Catholic school system. That decision was based on the assumption that the schools would have "a religious and educational influence on students over and above that of their families" (Flynn, 1993, p.XI). That crucial decision would also have a profound effect on the character and development of Australian Catholicism, "set up originally, the schools were, to preserve the Catholic

culture of the people, and to win places for Catholics in society, government and business” (Sippel, 1989, p.276).

## 2.4 The nature and purpose of Catholic education in the 1800s

A complete history of the development of the theological and philosophical imperatives underlying Catholic education is beyond the scope of this study. An appreciation of some key elements of the Church’s view of the nature and purpose of education at the time of the establishment of the Catholic school system in Australia is, however, important in understanding the Bishops’ motives and their vision.

### 2.4.1 Thomism

Up until Vatican II any Catholic philosophy of education was based on Thomistic principles. In fact “so accepted was Thomism as a philosophy within the Catholic Church that Catholic philosophers in the days before Vatican II swore an oath to teach Neo-Thomism” (Elias, 1988, p.14). Thomism and neo-Thomism were called thus because this philosophy derived its essential principles from Thomas Aquinas.

This philosophy was undergoing a revival around the time of the Catholic bishops’ decision in Australia, and this revival culminated in Leo XIII’s letter *Aeterni Patris* in 1879. It was also the philosophical position that underpinned the one major encyclical on education, *The Christian Education of Youth*, (*Divini Illius Magistri*) issued by Pope Pius XI in 1929.

For the Thomist the primary end of all education involved aiding the person achieve a supernatural destiny. This sublime task was made all the more difficult because of the sinfulness of the human person and the need for the grace of God. In fact, any theory of Catholic education was obliged to take into consideration these facts “about man (sic) and his destiny made known to him through revelation” (Elias, 1988, p.15).

These facts included:

1. The unique substantial form of man (sic) is his rational soul, which has three spiritual powers, a thinking intellect, an agent intellect and a will that freely determines itself. The activities of these faculties and powers of the soul demonstrate the spirituality and immortality of the soul.
2. By nature man has the right to cooperate with other men in society in the pursuit of personal happiness in the common good; this pursuit of happiness is guided by conscience, laws both natural and positive and virtues both private and public.
3. From the visible things of the universe the human mind can know the existence of God as the first efficient, supreme exemplar, and ultimate final cause of all salvation.

4. Beyond the order of nature there is a higher, supernatural order of reality, including truths of revelation, grace, merit, predestination and glory, that man could never know unless God revealed its existence.
5. There is harmony between faith and reason and between grace and nature, for there is only one author of both. Thus there can be no contradiction between faith and reason and grace perfects nature.
6. Although reason can, objectively speaking, demonstrate the existence of God, providence, the immortality of the human soul, it can in no way demonstrate the saving truths of revelation, such as the Incarnation, predestination, life everlasting and the Trinity.
7. The primary motive of the Incarnation of the Word is the Redemption of fallen mankind so that if Adam had not sinned, God would not have become man.
8. The Church as the Mystical Body of Christ is the sole custodian of faith and the sacraments. Sent to preach the Word to the world, the true Church of Christ must preserve unblemished the purity of divine revelation and the integrity of the sacraments
9. Eternal life consists in seeing God face to face, from which vision flows the fullness of happiness. Thus the essence of beatitude consists in the intellectual vision. However, in order to receive this beatific vision, the created intellect must be elevated by the light of glory (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, P. 368).
10. Only when we know what human persons are can we decide what sort of society they should live in and what kind of institutions they need.

Given these basic tenets, any education which ignored the spiritual or supernatural dimension was indeed fundamentally flawed. Catholic education was concerned with even greater things - "enabling persons to achieve the power of mind and will necessary to achieve necessary eternal salvation (Elias, 1988, p.17)". This theme was given further emphasis at the end of 1929 in Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, (Christian Education of Youth):

It is therefore as important to make no mistake in education, as it is to make no mistake in the pursuit of the last end, with which the whole work of education is intimately and necessarily connected. In fact, since education consists necessarily in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to obtain the sublime end for which he was created, it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end, and that in the present Order of Providence, since God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of His only Begotten Son, who alone is "the way, the truth and the life", there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education ( *Divini Illius Magistri* 1929, para. 7)

Written when Italian Fascists were requiring boys to spend Sundays in military drill, the encyclical opposed the modern state's monopoly on schools and devoted much attention to the rights of the family

and the Church in schooling and education. The family possesses an “inalienable right from the Creator” to educate children, a “right anterior to any right whatever in civil society and of the State, and therefore inviolable on the part of any power on earth (*Divini Illius Magistri*, para 32)”. The State according to Pius XI, does have a role to play in the welfare of its citizens but within limits

Everything therefore in human affairs that is in any way sacred, or has reference to the salvation of souls and the worship of God, whether by its nature or by its end, is subject to the jurisdiction of the Church. Whatever else is comprised in the civil and political order, rightly comes under the authority of the State.....(*Divini Illius Magistri* 1929, para. 52)

But clearly “first of all education belongs to the Church, by reason of a double title in the supernatural order, conferred exclusively upon her by God Himself...(*Divini Illius Magistri* 1929, para. 15). And to ensure that the preeminent role conferred upon the Church is not lost, “Christ conferred infallibility, together with the command to teach his doctrine (*Divini Illius Magistri* 1929, para. 16)”.

The early Bishops of Australia were indeed concerned with the eternal salvation of their flock. In their view, a Catholic education was essential in helping the members of that flock “make their way on earth by loving God and neighbour, and thus work out their eternal salvation by striving for the glory of God both on earth and hereafter in heaven” (Elias, 1988, p.17).

#### 2.4.2 Pius IX and the Syllabus of Errors

Another important influence on their thinking was the publication in 1864 by Pope Pius IX of the Syllabus of Errors, a Pastoral Instruction on various errors perceived to be prevailing at the time. The Syllabus was an attack on the rationalistic currents of the 19th Century that, in the Vatican’s eyes, sought to undermine religion, the Church and the true nature of civil society. Much was happening in the world of the 1800s, not the least in Italy where the question of the right of the Papal States to continue to exist was a critical question for Pius IX. The Syllabus was not only a spirited defence of the inalienable rights of God, of the Church and of truth against what was perceived as the abuse of the words freedom and culture on the part of unbridled liberalism, but it was also a protest against the attempts to eliminate the influence of the Catholic church on the life of nations and individuals, on the family and the school.

In the Church’s view her freedom was under attack as was her very nature as a true and perfect society. An individual, according to Pius XI, is born by baptism into a perfect society because this society has in itself all the means required for its own end, which is the eternal salvation of mankind; hence it is supreme in its own domain (*Divini Illius Magistri*, para. 13) Pius XI’s predecessor, Pope Gregory XVI had faced similar pressures. In responding he had called on the teachings of another pope of the tenth century to confront those who championed the power of the State to control religious matters. Pope Gregory further developed a teaching on the constitution of the Church as a society under the monarchical rule of the successor of Peter. The reasoning was quite simple - Christ established the Church as a monarchy. It was divinely endowed with a supreme authority and the pope is unable to alter this form of



government simply because the Church's constitution is of divine origin. Thus Pope Pius IX reasoned the Church "cannot and should not be reconciled and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization" (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.368).

According to the Church, excessive claims were being made for the power of reason. Reason was even being exalted in such a way as to do away with Revelation. Indifferentism was being promoted - that is, all religions were on a par with one another as a means of salvation. Modern liberals even espoused subjecting the Church to the laws and authority of the State. Syllabus Proposition Number 43, that the State should have the exclusive right to decide all questions in schools, was particularly offensive to the Bishops. Armed with this Document and the increasingly hardline Vatican Edicts of Pius IX the Bishops went in to fight for their schools and against liberal 19th Century society. The Church and the schools would be the bastion against the erosion in society of Christian doctrine and Christian values. Not only would Catholic schools be responsible for the education and Catholicism of the young generation, but they would also be responsible for their upward mobility. Catholic Schools would transform this ethnic minority and Catholics would take their rightful place in society not only for the Greater Glory of God and His Church but to ensure that Christian Doctrine and values would prevail when these upwardly mobile graduates became the leaders and decision makers in society (Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics* 1987, Penguin Australia, p. 34, Sippel, 1989, p. 276).

## 2.5 The Beginning of Catholic Education in the Colony

### 2.5.1 The First Schools

From the very beginning of the colony many Catholic parents and the leaders of the Catholic community placed special significance on the establishment of their own schools (Campion, 1986, p. 122). In 1820 the first priest to officially arrive in the new colony Fr John Joseph Therry found a number of Catholic schools were already in existence (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). At least two Catholic schools began in Sydney and Parramatta around 1804 -5 (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 30). But these schools and those which followed in those early times served but a small number. For example, in Victoria as late as 1891, the schools, religious and state, enrolled only 55,000 out of an eligible 122,000. Five years later there was no improvement - only 76,000 out of an eligible 176,000 were on the rolls. The situation in NSW was virtually the same (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). As Education was not high on the list of priorities in the new Colony and without Catholic chaplains the education in faith was left to the families. Some Catholics met in each others homes to pray and sustain each other in the faith but the lack of religious education was of significant concern to this fledgling church (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.31).

The number of Catholics grew and the Catholic community continued to establish its own schools, principally so that children could be taught "the faith". With the arrival of Fr Therry, Catholics continued to set up their own schools but now under his guidance and the guidance of the other priests as they arrived in the colony (Sippel, 1988, p.277).

### **2.5.2 Responsibility for Education given to the Established Church**

However, the Governors as well as the Colonial Office assumed that the administration of schools would be much the same as in Britain (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.2). In other words, the schools would be the responsibility of the established Church of England. This arrangement was formalised under the Clergy and Schools Corporation Act of 1826. By this Act, the Established Church of England would be endowed with one seventh of new lands in return for an education system which would be financed from land revenue and have no call on the government for finances. The scheme met with great opposition and was openly criticized by leaders of other churches (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.1; O'Kelly, 1972, p. 18). When Dr Ullathorne arrived in Australia as the first Vicar General he found that there were ten Catholic schools already established. In defence of these he wrote: "Under such a church domination the unfortunate Catholic, and equally unfortunate dissenter would be reduced to a worse than Egyptian bondage" (O'Kelly, 1972, p19).

After prolonged and volatile opposition by churchmen and others the Charter of Corporation was suspended in 1829 and revoked in 1833.

### **2.5.3 Towards a National Education System**

Governor Bourke wanted to construct a single education system, acceptable to all denominations, in which all children would mingle in one school, receive Bible instruction separate for denominational instruction from their own pastors. This scheme, based on the Irish National Education system aroused a Protestant outcry, led by Anglican Bishop Broughton who claimed that it infringed church authority over education and did not allow for adequate and proper religious instruction (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.4). In 1844 a leading Catholic cleric, Father MacEncroe denounced the Irish National Education system at the level of high principle, claiming that it involved encroachment by the State on the rights of the Church (McDonald, 1992, p.2). The Irish clergy had grown to dislike the system in Ireland. Even one of the framers of the Scripture course had written that "mixed (Catholic and Protestant) education is gradually enlightening the mass of the people, and that, if we give it up, we give up the only hope of weaning the Irish from the abuses of Popery" (O'Kelly, 1972, p. 19). So it was little wonder that the Australian Bishops opposed the system strenuously.

### **2.5.4 Australian Bishops - A Dual System of Education**

After the two attempts to establish a national school system failed, a dual system of church and state schools was created, whereby small government grants in aid were made to churches for land, buildings and salaries for schools (O'Kelly, 1872, p.19). At first the dual system was marked by the independence of the schools. Grants were given to the Churches which were responsible for the internal management of

the schools. Later more accountability was required by the government but in general the internal management of staffing and curriculum still remained with the churches (McDonald, 1992, p.3).

### 2.5.5 The States and Education

By the early 1860s the denominational system was under hostile pressure from the new State governments and a variety of restrictive regulations were introduced. By the 1860s and 1870s the result of these restrictions was becoming clear: the Catholic schools were gradually being squeezed out of the government system; the Protestant denominational schools were being destroyed altogether. For over half a century the state had assisted the denominational schools but, finding the schools rivals of its own, the state governments gradually isolated them by withdrawing its support (Campion, 1988, p. 32; Collins, 1986, p. 219).

An anti-Catholic bias was not the sole cause of this legislation although sectarian bias certainly did exist (Collins, 1986, p.218). One only has to have a cursory reading of the press of the day to learn of the sectarian prejudice, bitterness and ignorance prevalent at that time. Most Catholics had only a very rudimentary education and were particularly defenceless in the face of a society which opposed their beliefs and values.

The Bishops had good reason to seek safeguards for the faith and morals of their people. Hence there was a tendency to stress the separation and insulation of the Catholic community and to see the Catholic schools as a fortress in times of danger (NCEC Report, 1972, p.9)

In Victoria, for example, Attorney General Stephens spoke of the Catholic Church, through State subsidized schools creeping "like a fungus over the country" (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). Henry Parkes who was responsible for the Secular Education Act in New South Wales, stated in 1880: "The peculiar genius of the Roman Catholic Church is to thrive upon the enslavement of the human intellect" (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). But there was a genuine desire on the part of governments to provide adequate schooling for every child in the colony. Under the "secular liberalists" who were largely responsible for the Education Acts of the 1860s and 1870s, universal education was absolutely necessary if democracy was to work although that same liberalism implied a strong belief in the separation of church and state (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19).

The reasons why the various state parliaments enacted these laws were complex. Some legislators believed that Church schools were a threat to social cohesion in that they tended to perpetuate some of the divisions from "the old country" (Campion, 1988, p.34). Others believed that religion had no place in any public institution (Collins, 1986, p. 218). Many believed that one, unified government operated system would be the most efficient and economical way to provide universal education for the children of the colony (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). The bottom line was that the state and not the church should assume responsibility for education (Collins, 1986, p.219).

### **2.5.6 The Irish Connection**

To some Catholics the establishment of the public school system and the severance of financial aid to any other system was nothing short of the declaration of a religious war (Campion, 1988, p.34). And who better was there to lead the fight than new generation of Catholic Bishops who had joined the first Bishops of the new colony! These Bishops were Irish and their Irish experience taught them that what the Catholic population needed was good, firm leadership. The Bishops were quite well aware that there was nothing like an external threat to cement their leadership of this poor, ethnic and even embattled Catholic people (Collins, 1986, p.219; Campion, 1988, p.34).

It was true that Catholic Education was worth fighting for. Their Pastoral Letter of 1879 leaves little room for doubt: "...education without Christianity is impossible". But the fight to retain their control over the education of the Catholic children and their schools would also "weld the people under their Bishop awakening the sleepy thousands of discontented parents all around him", (Campion, 1988, p.33). Their tactic was very successful. By the beginning of the 20th century Catholics felt unjustly treated and saw "the martyred Church whose rights had been unjustly denied by the Government" (Turner, 1992, p.229).

The Catholic bishops saw public schools as not only fundamentally deficient and as usurping the legitimate role of the church, but those schools were positively harmful. In 1879 the New South Wales' Bishops condemned them "first because they contravene the first principles of Christian religion; and secondly, because they are seed-plots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness, being calculated to debase the standard of human excellence and to corrupt the political, social and individual life of future citizens" (Campion, 1982 p.67). They were, indeed, strong words - some would even suggest a declaration of war (Campion, 1988, p.34).

Gradually in every state in Australia, education became the right and preserve of the state government. Schooling became free, compulsory and secular. For parents who chose otherwise schools were no longer free, they had to be financed through fees as well as parental and church support. For Catholics there wasn't much choice! The 1885 Plenary Council ruled that parents who without just cause sent their children to a state school were to be denied absolution in the Sacrament of Penance (Turner, 1992, p.230, Campion, 1982, p.67). For the Bishops and the priests the crisis was not simply financial. For the first time these men who ruled their dioceses single-mindedly and independently were forced to reach agreement on and enunciate a concerted underlying philosophy of Catholic Education (Collins, 1991, p106).

### **2.6 Defining the Principles of Catholic Education**

During the 1860s the principles underlying Catholic education were gradually defined under the leadership of Archbishop Polding. The Catholic Bishops of Australia made their first united statement during the Provincial Council of 1862. It was attended by the bishops of Hobart, Melbourne, Brisbane and

Sydney. The bishops warned parents against seductive promises that State Education would be scholastically superior and advised them to proclaim, publicly and politically, their determination to retain the separate Catholic schools (Turner, 1992, p.229; Fogarty 1957, p352). These bishops were determined to ensure spiritual and religious values remained the pivotal point of education (Collins, 1986, p220). For them, “the basic principal was that Catholic Christianity must permeate all education” ( Collins, 1986. p.229).

In the battle to establish a separate and credible school system, the Bishops enunciated the principles underlying Catholic Education.

### **2.6.1 An education in a Catholic School was essential**

An education in a Catholic school was essential. For those Bishops a true, holistic, education must include God. By excluding God, the secular education offered by the State was fundamentally flawed. This secular education would produce immoral, corrupt and God denying people as it excluded so much of positive, revealed truth. It did not do justice to the souls of the children.

In 1885 the first gathering of the Australasian bishops in plenary council advised parents that:

The child whose early years have been spent in a well ordered Catholic home, and in regular and healthy attendance at a good Catholic school, has made the best preparations for the temptations and dangers which beset us all...We beg you to place your children at a good Catholic school and endeavour to keep them in constant attendance (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p 34)

The Bishops clearly believed that the Catholic parish primary school was an essential complement to the home in forming the next generation of Australian Catholics (Dwyer,1993,p.5). Greater emphasis, however, was placed on attendance at school when in 1990 the Cardinal and Bishops of Australia clearly stated that the “Christian education of a people cannot be accomplished at home and therefore it must be accomplished at school” (Turner, 1992, p.162). To add emphasis the Bishops decreed that “in towns and districts where a Catholic school is in operation Catholic parents who send their children to public or other anti-Catholic schools cannot be admitted to the sacraments, nor will children attending these schools under such circumstances be confirmed” (Turner, 1992, p. 162). These parents could even be accused of mortal sin and refused absolution if they persisted in their error (Crudden, 1972, p. 42).

### **2.6.2 Catholic Education needed a Catholic Environment**

The decision to establish an alternative school system was not simply a reaction against secularism in education. The Bishops were convinced that Catholic Christianity should permeate all education. It must be part of the very fabric of the school ethos, the schools’ programs and daily practices (Collins, 1986, p.219). The Bishops decided that “we must have for our children Catholic schools, Catholic teachers and, as fast as we can supply them, Catholic books.” This rallying call which was published on December 3rd,

1862 in the *Freeman's Journal*, was part of the Australian Bishops' first combined address on education. Underlying this call lay a number of very important points. Catholic schools were to be fundamentally different. Tacking on a half an hour of Bible reading or religious instruction was not sufficient. In 1859 Polding enunciated his vision of education, which was later adopted by the remainder of the Australian Bishops:

In Catholic thought it is neither safe nor right to accumulate almost the whole of religious instruction and doctrinal observance in one day out of the seven. The whole life is to be lived in the spirit of prayer (Turner, 1992, p.156)

For Polding, religion was the foundation of education and shall permeate the school day. Education in the Catholic view was a unity; it was not a "thing or mechanism that could be put together bit by bit, a little morsel of religious instruction here and of secular instruction there like 'separate parcels with as little reciprocal action as have two books on the shelves of a library' "(Fogarty, 1957, p.188).

Rather, Christian education was a "thing of life.....Not only the subjects taught, but the teacher and his faith, the rules and the practices of the school day, all combined to produce this result which the Church understood to be education" (Fogarty,1957 p.188). In Bishop Geoghegan's vision Catholic Education essentially involved schools where every kind of instruction was "interpenetrated by Catholic doctrine, by Catholic feeling and practice" (Fogarty, 1957 p.188).

### 2.6.3 Catholic Education was counter cultural.

In Victoria, when Attorney-General Stephans introduced the Secular Education Act in 1872, he claimed that "in a couple of generations, through the missionary influence of the State Schools, a new body of State doctrine and theology would grow up, and the cultural and intellectual Victorians of the future would discreetly worship at the shrine of one neutral deity, sanctioned by the State Department" (O'Kelly, 1972, p.19). It was no surprise then that the bishops reacted so forcefully. The bishops' world view, again buttressed on by the teachings of Pius IX, made spiritual and religious values the pivotal point of education. At this critical time they saw the Church as offering an alternative to the essentially flawed and deficient view of society as proposed by the secular liberalists. From this very beginning, Catholic schools sought to be counter cultural in what they taught, in their manner of teaching and in the religious atmosphere they sought to create.

At school they (the Catholic children) absorbed a culture most of them would never lose. Litany, novena, contrition, purpose of amendment, genuflection, altar boys -the special language of the culture would turn up in their speech for the rest of their lives, whether they lapsed or still practised (Campion, 1982, p.68)

So strong has been the influence on this largely working class minority who struggled to keep their schools open that for a century the Catholic school system dominated the Catholic history of Australia. It has conditioned radically the relations of the Catholics with other groups in society and with society as a whole and politically it has been the central concern of Catholic voters for most of the last century"

(Campion, 1982, p.67). The schools were the strongest single force in shaping Australian Catholicism (O'Kelly, 1972, p. 25).

#### 2.6.4 The role of the Catholic teacher was critical

The personal belief and character of the teacher were both essential ingredients in good Catholic teaching as far as the bishops were concerned. Bishops Geoghegan and Polding both held that a teacher could not remain neutral as far as religion was concerned and therefore each teacher should be capable of being entrusted with teaching religious education" (Fogarty, 1957, p.188). The Catholic teacher should be capable of ensuring that religion should be introduced into "almost every act which came under the notice of the children during education" (Fogarty, 1957 p.189). For the Bishops the state school system "seems to consider the child as a receiving machine and the teacher as an imparting machine and that there their relations end" (Turner, 1992, p.158). Much more was expected of the teacher in the Catholic school where he or she was responsible for permeating the entire curriculum with Christian Doctrine and for creating the much needed religious atmosphere.

#### 2.7 Catholic Education Prospers

With the demise in Government funding many of the best teachers in the Catholic schools had transferred to higher salaried positions in the State Department and there was a marked deterioration in the parish schools (Fogarty, 1957, p.81). New teachers had to be found but without government funding paying them would be a significant problem, as would be maintaining and expanding the school system. 'Universal coverage' was the goal - that is every Catholic child should be able to attend a Catholic school. (NCEC Report, 1972, p.6).

In one inspired move, the bishops addressed the problems of employing suitable, faith inspired teachers and their lack of financial resources. In the words of Bishop Vaughan, they undertook to bring to Australia:

a strong body of teaching religious orders who would give a tone and thoroughness to the rising Catholic generations then in a few years, Catholics would be strong enough and earnest enough, if they be not so at present, not only to assert, but to gain and maintain their rights (Turner, 1992, p.168)

The Bishops made numerous recruiting trips to Europe with the result that teaching nuns and brothers, vowed to poverty, came in their hundreds. With the heroic efforts of the largely working class Catholic community and the poverty of those nuns and brothers, the Catholic school system expanded and flourished (Dwyer, 1993, p.5; Carroll, 1988, p.20). The Irish religious were soon joined by a steady flow of Australian recruits and Australian religious orders were founded, notably Mary MacKillop's sisters of St Joseph and the Good Samaritan Sisters (O'Kelly, 1972, pp. 22-23). These religious were very clear about what was asked of them. At the opening of the first Christian Brothers school in Balmain in 1877 Brother H.B. O'Hagan clearly outlined the task of the Brothers: "Our main object shall ever be to teach

our pupils to value above all things their eternal salvation, and to secure this by faithfully and steadfastly adhering to the faith of their fathers".(cited in Campion, 1982, p. 68).

### 2.7.1 The Catholic Culture

These religious brought with them the faith, the spirituality and the religious practices of their native Ireland. They taught the faith of their fathers, still living in spite of dungeon, fire and sword. Another popular melody celebrated perfectly the separation of Catholic boys and girls from the others:

*I am a little Catholic;  
I love my holy Faith,  
I will be true to Holy Church  
And steadfast unto death.*

*I shun the schools of those who seek  
To snare poor Catholic youth;  
No Church I own - no schools I know,  
But those that teach the truth.*

One of the hallmarks of this Irish church was the fact that it was isolationist - Catholics had their own schools, their own churches, their own organisations, their own way of doing things. Mixed marriages were shunned. The Church was like an extended family or clan, a Catholic subculture (Turner, 1992, p.193). Because of the Bishops rhetoric and their actions, Catholics tended to view those outside 'the clan' with some distrust and to regard themselves as having "the unchanging truth" (Crudden, 1972, p.43). Catholics were encouraged to remain apart, as is evident from Archbishop Polding's comments that it is better for "the children of the Church to become members of a society truly Catholic, than to associate with men (sic) whose chief praise is that they are indifferent to all religion, who have nothing Catholic about them - whose societies are based on deceptive principles" (cited in Turner, 1992, p. 193). The withdrawal of state aid encouraged Catholics to withdraw even further, feeling themselves to be unjustly treated, even persecuted by Government "The defiant Catholic Church which had earlier chosen to opt out of the state system of education became, by the twentieth century, the martyred Church whose rights had been unjustly denied by the government" (Turner, 1992, p229).

For most Australian Catholics their image of Church was a local geographical parish, controlled by the parish priest and the religious sisters or brothers and centralised under the control of the Bishop (Brisbane Catholic Education Office, 1982, p.6). The Bishop was certainly in control, refusing even the consolation of the services of a priest at the funeral of anyone who dared join such prescribed by Cardinal Moran societies as the Oddfellows, Foresters, Druids and the like (Campion, 1982, p.71).

In reality, however, there was not really a Catholic curriculum. Catholic schools followed more or less the same curriculum as the Government schools (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.35). Although Bishop Quinn spoke in 1875 to the Royal Commission in Queensland of the Catholic school as being "wholly religious"



with an atmosphere created by a composite of Catholic teachers, Catholic books and practices of Catholic devotion, the acquisition of secular knowledge as taught in the State Schools was important for the child to prosper in the colony (Sippel, 1988, p.277). In fact the Catholic schools were seen as being in strong competition with their State counterparts.

Catholic school children came to identify themselves as worthy competitors with those from state schools, for the onus was on them to prove themselves. Secular subjects assumed greater importance and Poulding's ideal of religion permeating and directing education was often forgotten in the endeavour to match state schools - and other Catholic schools - in examination results (Turner, 1992, p.238)

School magazines and newspapers had no qualms about listing the academic and social successes of their graduates. The *Catholic Press* of 1 February 1923 was typical of much of the reporting about Catholic schools. The editor wrote that with "one-tenth of the pupils, and without the lavish assistance of the state, the Catholic high schools achieve one-fourth of the successes...they are more than holding their own against the costly establishments of the State..." In this period when the Catholic minority was among the poorest in the country, "Catholic education became the means of social mobility, especially as the schools proved themselves able to adapt to developing needs over the decades. The school and church that resulted was strongly cohesive and very sure of its identity" (Brisbane Catholic Education Office, 1982, p. 6).

### 2.7.2 The Parish School - the Core of Parish Life

The Catholic school was, by and large, a parochial school. The parish school became the core of parish life (Dwyer, 1993, p.5). A familial model was established like an extended family or clan - local units controlled by the parish priest and the religious teachers, and centralised under the hierarchical control of the bishop (Brisbane Catholic Education Office, 1982, p.6). Even as late as 1950 the following description could be made of the typical Catholic pupil:

The typical Catholic pupil was surrounded by reminders of the faith in regular daily prayers during the year were May altars, regular trips to the confessional, First Friday Masses and public professions of faith in Eucharistic, Marian and St Patrick's Day celebrations. The Catholic atmosphere of the school and each classroom was enhanced by prominently displayed crucifixes, pictures and statues of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady and various saints, and by the presence of distinctly garbed religious. Outside the classroom, pupils were encouraged to visit their churches for private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, to attend daily Mass and, in the case of boys, to raise their caps when passing a church (Gilchrist, 1986, p. 174)

The role of the parish priest with regard to the parish school has a long history, and is defined in Church law, local policy and custom (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1993, p.7). Ultimately he was the one responsible for protecting and defending the faith of his flock, "teaching, sanctifying and governing" (Canon 519) with the Catholic school having an "irreplaceable role in handing on the faith from generation to

generation" (Brisbane Catholic Education Office, 1982, p.6; Bathesby, *Pastoral Letter*, 1992). The story of Catholic education in Australia owes much to the local parish clergy:

How often did the burden of building schools, providing convents for the sisters etc fall of the local parish priest? Who had to voice the message of the bishops and enforce their severe discipline on the parents and parishioners? Who was called to account for the teaching of faith and morals in the schools?...even to our own time this fidelity has continued. So many priests have carried immense personal and pastoral burdens in the cause of Catholic schools. Their place in Catholic schools remains crucially important (Carroll, 1988, p.21)

With the arrival of the religious orders, Catholic schools had increased in number and the majority of Catholic children were able to attend a Catholic school (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.5).

### 2.7.3 The Golden Age of Catholic Education

For many Catholics the 1880s to the 1950s represented the Golden Age for Catholic schools (Gilchrist, 1986). Staffed mainly by religious nuns and brothers the schools struggled to contain the ever increasing number of students seeking enrolment. Classes of forty, fifty, sixty and even seventy students were not uncommon (Crudden, 1972, p.43; Dwyer, 1993,p.6). Resources were limited but the close ties between family, local parish and clergy and the school were almost tangible. The school and the church was strongly cohesive and very sure of its identity.

Everyone understood that a Catholic school was essentially a religious institution. It was the focus of a great many parish activities. It was staffed and administered by teachers who were readily identifiable as religious through their dress and manner of living and close involvement in parish life. The teaching of doctrine and morality and numerous practices of religious devotion held an important place in student life (BCEC, 1982, p.7)

The parochial school became the main symbol of Catholic culture (Campion, 1987, p.56).

There were so many signs of success. The Catholic population had built substantial school buildings in almost every parish. Sunday Mass attendance was extraordinarily high (the brothers and nuns saw to that on Monday mornings!) (Crudden, 1972, p.42), vocations to the priesthood and religious life ensured that the School system would continue (Collins, 1991, p130). Catholic sodalities and societies were popular and children knew their Faith - the Catechism enabled children to memorise its main truths, doctrines prayers and practices (Dwyer, 1993, p.5). The question and answer format established the family routine of "hearing the Catechism", usually just before or just after the family rosary (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.41). The demand for places in both Catholic primary, secondary and tertiary institutions was high (Crudden, 1972, p.43). The Bishops' dream of raising this embattled ethnic minority had been fulfilled (Dwyer, 1993, p.5). The Catholic press listed the names of prominent Catholics in the Queen's honours lists. Catholics had become captains of industry and key members of both the State and Federal Public Services (Sippel, 1986, p.277).

## **2.8 Pressures and Changes**

### **2.8.1 The World of the 1960s**

Although the 1960s was probably the decade when most Australians grew conscious of the changes that were taking place in society, the church and in education, major changes had begun immediately after the Second World War. With the influx of migrants and refugees into Australia new pressures emerged, not just in society generally but in the Church as well (Flynn, 1993, p.107). A very significant number of these new arrivals were Catholic and they were demanding Catholic schooling for their children (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.5). Not only did these extra numbers add to the post war baby boom by placing an intolerable burden on an already overcrowded system (Dwyer, 1993, p.6; Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.38) but they directly challenged 'the Irish Way'. They did not practise the Faith as the Irish did. Festivals, processions, statues took on added significance and, to the cultural outsider, the hallmark of Irish Catholicism, attendance at weekly Sunday Mass appeared virtually optional (Campion, 1988, p.176). The newcomers did not contribute to the sacrificial planned giving schemes or to schools as had been the custom. Many simply did not have the money and others came from countries where the state paid for it all (Collins, 1991, p.51). Catholic schools were always in a state financial constraint but the increase in numbers added further significant pressure (Dwyer, 1993, p.11). Added to the need to find more room the fact that English was not the first language of many of the new arrivals meant that the old ways of teaching did not always work and these children required special attention (Campion, 1988, p.180; Dwyer, 1986, p.2).

But other changes were happening too. The mainstay of the Catholic school system was drying up - fewer and fewer young people were entering the priesthood and religious life (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.5). To keep the system going lay teachers had to be employed, creating not only extraordinary financial pressures but a crisis of confidence for the Catholic people who were so used to handing over the training in the faith of their children to the nuns and the brothers (Gilchrist 1986; Dwyer, 1993, p.65). Without Government funding the system was on the verge of collapse (Dwyer, 1993, p.8).

### **2.8.2 The Return of State Aid**

The Goulburn Strike of 1962, when Catholic parents threatened to close all Catholic schools in the city and to demand admission into the State schools, was a very potent gesture which "thoroughly frightened the New South Wales State Government" (Collins, 1991 p.108). A remarkable change has taken place in those last thirty four years since that dramatic event. The Catholic system is now deeply dependent on the government aid which began with capital assistance granted in the ACT in 1965 and has progressed to around eighty per cent funding of all costs today (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.5). The Karmel Report, instituted by the Whitlam Government in 1973 marked an extraordinary shift in government and community attitudes. The Report reversed a century of government policy when it made recommendations about the financial needs of both government and non-government schools, and in

doing so reported that it valued the rights of parents to educate their children outside government schools (Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.6).

For some (Cruden, 1972; Hogan, 1984; Collins, 1991, Leavey, 1993) that recognition and funding came at a cost. Governments have their own educational priorities and can at times directly challenge the independence, the priorities and directions of the Catholic school system.

It is impossible for Catholic schools to offer a genuinely alternative education if they are no more than institutions whose standards and priorities are set directly or indirectly by the state and federal governments (Collins, 1991, p.111)

At this time a new Catholic school culture is beginning to emerge, "growing out of our story and traditions but involving a deep reconceptualising of the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling" (Dwyer, 1993, p.17). Not only are parental, community and government expectations changing, but, after Vatican II, a new understanding of Church and of its role is also emerging.

## 2.9 A New Catholic Culture

### 2.9.1 Changing Expectations - affluence and identity

The Australian community has become much larger, more affluent, more urbanised, more varied in country of origin (Dwyer, 1986, p.3). Catholics have been part of these changes and it is no longer appropriate to regard them 'deprived' or as the poor ethnic minority the early Irish Bishops shepherded in the new Colony:

Largely because of Catholic schools there is now a considerable body of educated Catholics, who are seeking a higher standard of education for Catholic children. There has been a gradual disappearance of hostility to Catholics of the kind so evident a hundred years ago (*The Education of Catholic Australians*, 1972, p. 10)

But Catholics are no longer willing to accept overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers and under resourced schools (Dwyer, 1986, p.3). They want their schools to be at the very least equal if not better than their State counterparts (Flynn, 1993, pp.107 - 114). Better education brings with it a better understanding of what opportunities further education can bring.

But does being better than our state counterparts, however, simply mean ensuring our students are "better performers in the competitive rat race" (Collins, 1986, p.220). Have Catholic schools begun to fall into the trap of becoming, as Leavey suggests, "cheering squads for the contemporary culture" (Leavey, 1993, p.9) rather than raising questions about the prevailing culture, providing opportunities to critique it and to put it in perspective (Collins, 1986, p.217). With this affluence comes a challenge to Catholic identity.

There is research evidence, supported by common experience that many parents are choosing the Catholic school for their children with virtually no commitment to religious goals. Discipline, pastoral care, safe moral environment, examination results, status of the private school, job opportunities are some of the reasons why parents choose Catholic schools. It is possible that only about a third or, at best, one half of parents choose it for religious reasons (Leavey, 1993, p.9)

If Catholic schools are to offer a genuine alternative and dare to be different from other schools, then this difference must not simply be in better exam results, better discipline or the like. Rather, Catholic schools “must reflect in themselves and form in their students a coherent Catholic understanding of the nature of human existence and they must espouse the values that underpin that understanding” (Collins, 1986, p.217).

But there is certainly not a clear consensus on a “coherent Catholic understanding” among those who seek to enrol their sons and daughters in a Catholic school.

### **2.9.2 Changing Expectations - Back To Basics or a New Vision?**

For many of those involved in Catholic Education the 1960s presented difficult challenges. Not only was there a rapid change from religious to lay staffing of school but many of the religious, particularly women religious, were in the forefront implementing the Vatican II reforms. They became the focus of criticism for those less well disposed towards change (Dwyer, 1993, p.2; Gilchrist, 1986, p.112). At the same time, lay Catholics, without any scriptural or theological education, were asked to teach religion. While some had ambivalent feelings about the Church, most found it difficult to clarify their personal stance in relation to a rapidly changing church and to rapidly changing approaches to Religious Education (Crawford & Rossiter, 1986).

There was a reaction against the traditional authoritarian approaches of the 1950s and the years following the Council witnessed conflict and polarization among adult church members and alienation and rejection on the part of many young Catholics. Their anger found its focus in the religion classroom, which became a most unpleasant place for a teacher to work in. For many Catholics, Religious Education is still a difficult issue (Gilchrist, 1986; Crudden, 1972, p.47; Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.41).

From the 60s the Kerygmatic approach was introduced into Australia. This approach which was much more firmly based on contemporary theories of classroom teaching and learning than the old Question and Answer techniques, involved the student in actively learning Bible stories, singing, praying (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.40). The Second Vatican Council caused further developments, particularly with its new understandings of revelation. In the 1970s curriculum materials emphasised the child's own experience and, rather than stress Church tradition, this new approach relied on the teacher to provide opportunities for students to recognise and experience God working in their lives. Religion classes relied more on creating a caring environment with much celebration, personal sharing of experiences, prayer and ritual (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.40).

These changes to the approach of religious education were often bitterly contested within the Catholic community (Gilchrist, 1986, p.179). Some within the community argued that the new approach did not present children with an understanding of the authority of the Church on matters of faith and morals. Proponents of experiential catechetics claimed that this approach had far greater relevance in the lives of children and that God's love and care were a priority over moral and religious rules (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.41). This continuing polarisation over the question of religious education in schools reflects a wider reality of life for Australian Catholics in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Great changes were occurring in the lives of many Catholics. Some embraced change; others resisted strenuously (Ryan and Malone, 1996, p.41).

A number of back to basics movements appeared, not only focussing on religious issues but in other issues such as literacy and numeracy, and the so-called decline in discipline (Dwyer, 1986, p.23). Some Catholics have been frightened, not only by the rapid social change of the last decades but also by the changes in their own Church; they have "a double reason for being distressed at developments that challenge their deeply internalised view of reality" (Dwyer, 1986, p.26). What is of particular interest in Flynn's research is that parents who choose Catholic schools for their children on religious grounds have a high level of religious expectations of Catholic schools (Flynn, 1993, p.155). For many of those parents, the Catholic school is seen to be more traditional than their state run counterparts (Dwyer, 1986, p.34). If this traditional Catholic education, in Dwyer's view, excites curiosity, opens young minds, stimulates a search for meaning, fosters a sensitivity to people and nature, and awakens a social conscience, it is worth having. According to Dwyer, if it is more concerned with sporting achievements, examination results and cosmetic features of uniform clothing and behaviour on buses and trains then the authentic tradition of a Christian education has been lost (Dwyer, 1986, p.37).

Wrestling with the nature of what Catholic schools should be in this new affluent age was not the only problem facing the Catholic population.

### **2.9.3 Changing Roles - Religious and Lay**

The work of the religious congregations in building networks of schools and in successfully contributing to the education of generations of Catholic children is one of the great success stories of the Australian Catholic Church (Dwyer, 1993, p.102; Carroll, 1989, p.21; Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.35).

There has been a rapid decline in the number of religious priests, sisters and brothers over the past thirty years but, what is even more pertinent is the suggestion that the Church has become "lazy expecting them to meet every ministerial need" (Collins, 1986, p.197). The Catholic Bishops relied very heavily on the continued presence of religious in their schools, not simply as a source of cheap labour (Dwyer, 1993, p.5) but because their influence on the religious values and culture of the school was profound.

Through the witness of their lives and the thoroughness of their

teaching, parents were confident that their children's faith was in good hands. The early challenge of providing primary school education for every Catholic child who sought it expanded to the need for secondary schools and once again the religious led the way. It was chiefly due to their efforts that Australian Catholics emerged from an underprivileged and deprived position and were able to take their proper place in the social, employment and professional areas (Carroll, 1989, p.21)

Those who attended Catholic schools in the first half of this century would have been taught, almost without exception, by a religious priest, sister or brother. Today ninety five per cent of the teachers in Catholic schools are lay teachers (Dwyer, 1993, p.12). Perhaps one of the most alarming findings of Flynn's research is the change in students' attitudes to their teachers over the past two decades. While students respect their teachers as mentors of their academic achievement at school, Flynn concluded, they no longer see them as models, or sponsors, of their religious development. What is even more alarming, however, is the fact that students considered that teachers were having a negative impact on their religious beliefs and values, and a negative influence on the moral and social justice values of the students (Flynn, 1993, p.428). It is little wonder then that Flynn suggests that "the religious development of staff may well be one of the most urgent tasks facing administrators in Catholic schools" (Flynn, 1993, p.428). He is not alone in that belief. Faith, according to Collins, must be a characteristic of those who exercise the ministry of teaching in a Catholic school and Catholic teachers must be formed and trained in a coherent theological belief as well as in the particular aspect of human culture in which they specialize (Collins, 1991, p.113).

While the transition from religious to lay has been a relatively smooth one, according to Dwyer, there is a need for continued sensitivity and wisdom. Today's task is to

- build collaborative partnerships where the vocations, the talents and the special contributions of all involved in Catholic education are valued and used to build and strengthen the community as a whole
- ensure that teachers and parents understand and appreciate the significance of their respective roles
- give special priority to assist teachers in developing a relevant and life-giving spirituality

(Dwyer, 1993, p.103)

This rapid change is a very significant one but it cannot be separated from the changing role of the laity in the Church as a whole.

#### **2.9.4 Changing Understandings of Church & Ministry**

The Sixties were a time of questioning old ways and old values. Radical advances in science, technology and communication were transforming society and the Church itself was not immune to change (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.40). The Second Vatican Council introduced changes into the Church's view of its mission, in its understanding of relationship with the world, in the understanding of freedom and personal responsibility (Edwards, 1986, p.73; Collins, 1991, p.13). The Bishops returned to the Biblical notions of

the Church as the pilgrim People of God, the Mystical Body, indicating the desire of the Council for a Church community which was inclusive and participative where people would be more involved in the work of the church rather than waiting to be told what to do. Until Vatican II the Church was seen in clear and precise terms. Pope Leo XIII, himself a rather radical thinker and reformer for his day described his vision of church

It is beyond dispute and quite unambiguously clear that two ranks or orders exist in the Church that are quite different in nature. The Pastors and the Flock. In other words, the leaders and the people. The first of these two ranks is the function of teaching, governing and directing people in life and establishing necessary rules. The other has the duty of submitting itself to the former, obeying him, carrying out his orders and paying him honour (Leo XIII *Satis Cognitum*, 1986)

His successor, Pope Pius X continued this theme, again in quite unambiguous terms:

In the hierarchy alone reside the power and authority necessary to move and direct all the members of our society to its end. As for the many they have no other right than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastors as obedient flock (Pius X, *Vehementer Nos*, 1910)

That view persisted until Vatican II when the Church returned to Biblical notion of the People of God. This notion brought with it a different view of the roles of the hierarchy and the laity, indeed a new understanding of the mission of the church in the world was emerging.

### 2.9.5 The Church in the Modern World

The Pastoral Constitution, *The Church in the Modern World*, presented a model of Church radically different from that of the Irish Bishops of the early colony. This document stressed the service nature of the Church and the episcopacy, presenting the Church as embedded in the world rather than separated from it, and at the service of the whole family, a Church that is truly participative and collaborative, committed to a concept of human and baptismal equality, ready to respond to new situations (Edwards, 1986, p.73). In addition, *Gaudium et Spes* presented a more modest church "which admitted to not having the answers to all problems and expressed a willingness to work with others to discover solutions to the pressing problems of our times" (Elias, 1988, p.21). The concept of the Church as the People of God, not primarily as a hierarchical institution, has led to a horizontal, community model of ministry where the members serve each other rather than a vertical institution where a few designated ministers dispense grace to the community (Black, 1990, p.25).

The Bishops also emphasised the need to respect individual conscience and responsibility. The Decree on Ecumenism issued a call to work in dialogue with other churches and other religions. Religious freedom is espoused:



It is therefore completely in accord with the nature of faith, that in matters religious every manner of coercion on the part of men should be excluded (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 1964, para.10)

In addition the Church urged all its members to take much greater initiative and that “the faithful, both clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of enquiry and of thought and the freedom to express their minds....”(Church in the Modern World, 1965, para. 62).

The 1993 *Code of Canon Law* sees the “common responsibility of all the Christifideles for the communion and mission of the Church. By reason of Baptism all the Christian faithful are participants in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. Furthermore, all are called to the mission that the People of God carry out as the Church of Christ” (Canon 204).

This was indeed a radical change from the *pray, pay and obey* mentality of the pre Vatican II church which so influenced the Bishops who guided the Catholic school system so rigidly.

## 2.10 The Nature and Purpose of the Catholic School Since Vatican II

From its earliest origins the Australian Catholic school was established as part of the Church’s mission. The Pastoral Letter of the 1862 Provincial Synod makes clear that the Catholic school was a place to provide religious instruction in an atmosphere of general Catholic culture, where secular instruction was “interpenetrated” by Christian Doctrine, where the community of faith between teachers and taught was essential and where the whole organisation of the school reflected its religious goals and a notion of educational “unity” (Leavey, 1993, p.7). While there have been vast changes in Catholic schools since the 1860s, and vast changes in those who use them, the continued official view is that the Catholic school is a special place where religious faith is to permeate the whole of the curriculum.

### 2.10.1 The Distinctive Purpose of the Catholic School

Since Vatican II the Church has addressed the importance of the Catholic school several times. The documents include *The Declaration of Christian Education* (1965) from Vatican II, *the Catholic School* (1977), *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School* (1988), and *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1983). The one theme running through all of these documents is that there is something quite distinctive about the Catholic school. In contrast to the 1929 Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* which was so much concerned with the purpose of education being essentially involved with eternal salvation and man’s(sic) last end, Vatican II’s *Declaration on Christian Education* starts with “the dignity of the person, which gives every man (sic) the right to a human education and from the dignity of the children of God, which gives all the baptised the right to a Christian education” (Buctow, 1988, p.9). The fundamental difference in approach, however, stems the changing appreciation of the meaning of the Incarnation. Whereas the emphasis of the 1800s was placed on the Incarnation as the coming of the New Adam and the redemption of sinful humankind, Vatican II views the Incarnation as transforming human nature, giving it new dignity and purpose. The Incarnation “indissolubly joined

together what men and women have always endeavoured to keep apart: the sacred and the secular, the human and the divine, faith and life. The fact that God entered the course of History and became one of us in Jesus profoundly influences the Christian's understanding of education" (Flynn, 1993, p.17).

The 1977 document entitled *The Catholic School* addresses the nature of the Catholic school in these terms:

The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole man (sic), since in Christ, the Perfect Man, all human values find their fulfillment and unity (*The Catholic School*, 1977, para.35)

According to this Document the specific mission of the Catholic school is the "critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith....and the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living" (para 49). This document also teaches that the Catholic school is also distinctive because of its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.

While Leavey (1993) calls for a note of caution when dealing with official statements as they often "difficult to read, tend to be essentialist in language and paternalistic in tone...and tend to inflate the goals of Catholic schools and to bear little relation to empirical reality" (Leavey, 1993, p.7), she asserts that *The Catholic School* (1977) is significant for several reasons:

The document points out the distinctive identity; the integration of faith and culture or even better "the critical transmission of the culture in the light of the Gospel"; it also says clearly that it is not simply a place where religion is taught side by side with secular knowledge. Finally it emphasises the need for educational processes to be morally responsible and adapted to the needs of youth, with concern for personal freedom and to proceed by way of illumination, rather than indoctrination (Leavey, 1993, p.8)

Consequently, the Catholic school seeks to integrate the curriculum, to unify faith and culture while respecting the autonomy of individual subjects. Church documents explicitly reject the use of the Catholic school as a place of so called 'proselytism, of imparting a one sided outlook', or where 'pre-cast conclusions' are offered. Such approaches are directly contrary to the Church's teaching about the complimentary relationship between faith and reason, the Gospel and culture, commitment and freedom. (*The Catholic School*, 1977, para 27).

### 2.10.2 The Catholic School and the Development of the Whole Person

The existence of a Religious Education program alongside the rest of the secular curriculum does not make a school a Catholic school. As the 1988 document states:

the world of human culture and the world of religion are not like two parallel lines that never meet; points of contact are established within the human person. (*Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1988, para.52)

*The Catholic School (1977)* stresses that the school must begin from the principle that “its education program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person (*The Catholic School*, para. 29)”, the physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, vocational, moral and religious. The purpose of education is the development of the person from within “freeing him (sic) from that conditioning which would prevent him (sic) from becoming a fully integrated human being” (*The Catholic School*, para. 29).

Catholic schools, therefore, give a unique meaning to education as “Catholic schools provide a religious education in which growth in faith is nurtured within the development of the whole person - not as icing on the cake, but as the yeast which, from within, gives form and direction to the whole educational process” (Flynn, 1985, p.22). For Catholic educators today the development of the whole person finds its centre and fulfilment in Jesus and the incarnational understanding of human life.

Jesus was God in person and through him all things human assumed a new dignity and importance.... In becoming man in Jesus, God gave new dignity and significance to the development of the whole person. He gave to human persons the possibility of becoming the revelation of the divine in this world (Flynn, 1985, p.20)

Therefore, in contrast to the Thomistic view which found much credence in the 1929 encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, from the Vatican II educational viewpoint there are not two forms of education, one secular in which students are prepared for life in the world, and the other religious, in which they are concerned with the spiritual dimension of life. These two forms of education are united. All education is part of God’s revelation of God’s presence in the world.

The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole man (sic), since in Christ, the Perfect Man, all human values find their fulfillment and unity. Herein lies the specific character of the school. Its duty is to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right...finds its origin in the person of Christ (*The Catholic School*, 1977, para. 35)

Catholic schools, therefore, endeavour to integrate a specific value tradition, the Catholic faith, within the education of the whole person. In undertaking this critical task, Catholic schools “challenge the prevailing materialism and secularism of modern times with the spiritual values of Jesus and the Gospels. At the same time, they are truly Catholic to the extent that they respond to this Gospel challenge and are involved in all dimensions of what it means to be fully human in today’s society” (Flynn, 1985, p.20).

This kind of objective can only be achieved by the whole staff working together in the light of an agreed educational and Christian vision (*The Catholic School*, 1977 para. 34, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 1980, para.18).

### **2.10.3 The Catholic School and The Ministry of Teaching**

It is more than thirty years since the Second Vatican Council challenged the Church to read the signs of the times and to enter into a process of renewal. The growing understanding of the importance of

ministry has perhaps been one of the most urgent yet painful processes for the modern Church (Black, 1990, p.5). For some, the ordination of more priests is the greatest need in the church today, for others, the expansion of ministry is an expression of a wider spread of leadership and a greater diffusion of gifts in the Church:

The understanding of Baptism as the basis for vocation, rather than ordination, has also resulted in the expansion of ministry, which is seen as both the right and responsibility of membership in the Church community. In emphasising that the Church exists for the Reign of God, the Second Vatican Council expanded the scope of ministry from the confines of the Church to the arena of the whole world.. The Council also emphasised that the mission of the Church includes service as well as preaching. In emphasising that authority is for service, not domination, the Second Vatican Council opened the way for developing a shared leadership based on a mutuality of gifts and sharing of wisdom (Black, 1990, p.25)

Catholic schools are not just educational institutions but an important part of the Church's ministry. One of the urgent challenges facing those concerned with Catholic schools is to educate teachers in an appreciation of teaching as a form of Christian ministry (Treston, 1983, p.6). Teaching is one of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned by Paul (1 Cor 12: 4-11) and Christian education and formation is a ministry that finds its origin in faith and is meant to lead to faith (Collins, 1991, p.112). That message was given even more emphasis by Pope John Paul II in his address to Catholic teachers in Melbourne in 1986:

Your profession as teachers involves tasks that are linked to your Baptism and to your own commitment in faith. I repeat that in a very special way you share in the mission of the Church. No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your students more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living traditions of the Church (Campion, 1986, p. 124)

Where a teacher accepts a position in a Catholic school, he or she becomes associated with its mission; in this case the parents and the Church call on that person to teach on their behalf (Dwyer, 1993, p.68). That mission was perhaps more clearly understood when schools were largely controlled and staffed by religious whose lifestyle and dress gave a very clear witness. But in reality that period in our history was quite short. The Catholic school in Australia is now returning to the situation prior to the 1880s when it was staffed predominantly by lay teachers (Flynn, 1993, p.142). What is required of them today, however, is not only that they be competent in their subject disciplines but that they should be witnesses to faith and testify to the resultant values in their everyday lives (Flynn, 1993, p.412). Their teaching is not confined to formal lessons or to words alone but "the very presence of teachers, the way they live, the way they relate to people. the values they demonstrate, all help their students to make sense of life" (Dwyer, 1993, p.68).

Enabling teachers to appreciate and grow in their understanding of their ministry as teachers must be one of the highest priorities facing Catholic administrators.

#### 2.10.4 The Catholic School and The Option for the Poor

Catholic education became a very effective means of social mobility for those Catholics who were among the poorest of the early Colonists (Dwyer, 1993, p.5). In that sense the Church certainly exercised its option for the poor. One wonders how much influence that option for the poor exercises in today's Catholic schools but given this story of Catholic education in Australia and its feature of service to the poor, Catholic schools must continue this tradition, even though it may be "a dangerous game to play, this reviewing the school culture from the point of view of the poor and the way they see themselves and their world" (Dwyer, 1993, p.113).

The option for the poor is not simply a matter of adjusting school fees but it calls for a much deeper examination of the very nature of the Catholic school:

it calls for a reflection on our enrolment policies, the comprehensiveness of our curriculum, relationships within the school, the values that are reinforced at assemblies and bulletins, our definitions of success and personal worth, our disciplinary policies, our grading arrangements, our assessment procedures, in short, the very culture of the school (Dwyer, 1993, p.113)

#### 2.24 Catholic Education in the Third Age

The story of Catholic Education in Australia is in what has been called, the Third Age.

When Mary and Michael Bourke opened the first Catholic school in Queensland 150 years ago, they were part of a lay movement who worked in partnership with Government to improve the conditions of the people of the colony.

The Second Age saw the growth of religious orders. Schools flourished not just academically, but in a variety of other ways - often with a distinct undercurrent of upward mobility. The schools were stable and cohesive, held together with strong core values.

A Third Age has begun and a new reality is emerging as Catholic schools begin reading the signs of these times. From many points of view Catholic schools today are manifestly successful. For example, in the Diocese of Townsville the 1996 school year began with record enrolments, the biggest budget since the establishment of the Catholic Education office, and a payroll involving 876 people, creating a fortnightly payment figure of \$902,098.

But many things have changed. The children in our schools come from families which are characterised by the following:

- \* the family of the 21st Century will have more adults than children
- \* parents have a higher level of education and have raised expectations about their children's education
- \* an increasing percentage of children live in families which are dependent on Social Welfare
- \* approximately 30% of marriages end in divorce
- \* children spend as much time watching television as attending school
- \* the high mobility of the population results in less access to extended family members
- \* both parents furthering personal careers
- \* young children spend more time in child care agencies
- \* there is less opportunity for family rituals, eg 70% of children in USA do not have a meal with the family altogether
- \* multi-cultural family patterns demonstrate a wide diversity of role expectations

(Treston, 1992, p.45)

Those who teach in Catholic schools need to address the day-to-day implications of these changes. In addition, according to the Diocese of Townsville's Director of Catholic Education in an address to principals at the opening of the 1996 school year, "whether we think it is good or not, we know that the parish is not a reality in the lives of many of our students. The school is Church and you, the leader, are seen as leader in Church. So from Educator to Social Workers to Faith Leader - the role of the Principal expands."

Not only has regular weekly attendance at Church services dropped to around 30% (Ryan & Malone, 1995, p.10), but many of our students are hearing Christ's message for the first time while still others have heard but have decided to put it on hold (Flynn, 1993, p.340), while yet others have rejected it.

Many young people experience frustration with the established churches because they do not appear to be addressing the problems which are of greatest concern to them. One explanation for the decline in adolescent church participation is the lack of response from the church to the social and world problems that concern youth the most (Leavey, 1993, p.10). In addition, according to social researcher Hugh Mackay, many young people tend to be pessimistic about their future, particularly in the light of unemployment, pollution and political leadership (Flynn, 1993, p.13).

The role of Catholic education in this third age, according to Director of Education Byrne is to pass on this rich heritage that "as a result of the coming of Jesus, we live in a redeemed world. Failings and limitations can be overcome. We can be more than we are at present; society itself can be regimented; the world can be renewed. We are people of the resurrection, people of hope (Dwyer, 1993, p.79).

## 2.25 New Models of Catholic Education

The Australian Catholic school has been affected by many changes over the past two hundred years. The Catholic school of today is very different from the traditional models of the 1950s. Roles have changed significantly for the parish priest, the religious, parents and lay teachers. Organisational structures and models for schools and parishes are being developed that are quite different from those of the past. In this time of transition both in society and in the church, it is becoming clear that we need to develop new models of Catholic education which reflect more clearly the changing context in which the Catholic school exists.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY OR METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of some of the main stakeholders in Catholic education today in the Diocese of Townsville in the light of the original vision espoused by the Bishops who established the Catholic school system in Australia. The research is very much concerned with the perceptions of particular people in a particular time and place.

If new models of Catholic education are to be developed then the task in changing any organisation, depends, first, upon the varieties of reality which individuals see in existing organisations, and second, upon their acceptance of new ideas which can or should be achieved through social action (Greenfield, 1975, p.19). Changes in the Diocese of Townsville are not unique but are perhaps developing at a faster rate than other dioceses throughout Australia. The demise of clerical leadership in parishes is clearly evident. The model of Catholic education envisaged by the Bishops with its close links between family, school, and parish is also rapidly breaking down.

### 3.2 The Research Approach

This study sought to gain initial information about the purpose of Catholic schools from the perspective of those who lead Catholic schools and from the perspective of those who lead parishes in the Diocese of Townsville.

Investigating the perceptions of key stakeholders in any organisation is important. Those perceptions take on greater significance if we accept the definition of organisations, proposed by Greenfield, as the perceived reality within which people make decisions and take actions which seem right and proper to them. Those people are always learning, always interpreting and inventing "the reality" around them. Organisations are not structures subject to universal laws, rather they are "cultural artifacts dependent upon the specific meaning and intention of the people within them" (Greenfield, 1975, p.74).

The case study approach appeared to be the most appropriate means to gather this information.

#### 3.2.1 The Case study

The Case study is defined by Wilson "a process of research which tries to describe and analyse some entity in qualitative, complex and comprehensive terms not infrequently as it unfolds over a period of time" (Wilson, 1979, p.448). Case study involves the collection of data to produce some understanding of the entity being studied - it is the "preferred strategy when 'how', 'why' or 'what' questions are being asked....or when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context" (Burns, 1994,



p.313). Case study has the added advantage of coming close to investigating the way people know and understand in everyday life (Stake, 1976, p.2).

The data gathered will be “glossed” with the meanings and purposes of those people and places, (Greenfield, 1975, p.17) and the interpretive techniques employed seek to “describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1979, p.520). This approach seeks to produce data in vivo, as it were. The researcher must be part of the research and to operate as closely as possible to the workplace as this type of methodology is concerned with the rational, the serendipitous, the intuitive, the researcher’s experience, contextual understandings and empathetic objectives.

### 3.2.2 Appropriateness of the Case Study Method

Case studies have certain basic generic qualities which also added to the appropriateness of this approach for this particular study:

- a) Case studies are particularistic as they portray events in one particular situation/phenomenon as it exists in reality
- b) Case studies are holistic as they endeavour to capture as many variables as possible
- c) They are longitudinal as they have a dynamic quality and tell a story which covers a period of time.
- d) They are qualitative as they usually use prose and literary technique to describe, elicit images, and analyse situations rather than to summarise quantitative data. They present documentation of events, quotes, samples of artifacts and so on (Wilson, 1979, p.448).
- e) The goal of case study research is to increase understanding of the variables, parameters and dynamics of the case under study. By its very nature a case study provides information on the actions and perspectives of a variety of groups (Wilson, 1979).

The study may serve to gather some data about issues currently influencing Catholic schools. As outlined above, there is much speculation in this area. Secondly, the data gained from this research may also represent a valuable contribution to theory building in that it may serve to confirm, challenge or extend a theory by refuting a universal generalisation (Burns, 1994, p.314), or it may assist in refocussing the direction of future investigations in the area by showing that things are so or that such an interpretation is plausible in a particular case and therefore might be so in other cases (Burns, 1994, p.313).

### 3.3 Limitations of the Study

It is not my intention to embark on an exhaustive, detailed study and analysis, but rather to explore the perceptions of some key people, the leaders of Catholic schools and parishes in the Diocese of

Townsville. This course of action is undertaken for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Burns suggests, the definition of the group as a unit which separates it in some way from the general population is crucial to any successful case study. Not only must the researcher make sure that "they are not just people of the same age, sex or other attribute but that they actually identify with each other, share expectations and interact in a close way" (Burns, 1994, p.315).

Secondly, to try to seek to responses from everyone involved in Catholic education in the Diocese would be an impossible task and one well beyond the scope of this study. In addition, for a case study, the focus of attention is in the case in its "idiosyncratic complexity, not on the whole population of cases. It is not something to be represented by an array of scores. We want to find out what goes on within that complex bounded system" (Burns, 1994, p.313).

School leaders were deemed to include the principal, deputy principal, assistant to the principal (religious education) or the religious education co-ordinator, and the assistant to the principal (pastoral care). Parish leaders were also included in the study. Leadership of parishes in this Diocese includes priests as well as lay and religious pastoral associates. The parish leader views the Catholic school from a rather unique perspective which must be included to ensure that the baseline data is as comprehensive as possible.

As the study was seeking perceptions rather than endeavouring to prove or disprove a hypothesis, the notion in case-study research that there is no one true definition of the situation was also an advantage. In social situations, truth is multiple (MacDonald & Walker, 1983, p.7). In fact coming to understand an individual in relation to his (sic) environment is regarded by some as the greatest advantage of this methodology (Verma & Beard, 1981, p.62).

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

#### **3.4.1 Approval for the Research**

Approval for the research was gained through the university ethics committee. But ethics is not something that can be forgotten once the demands of a review board are met. Rather ethical considerations are "inseparable from your everyday interactions with your others and with your data" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.109). Case study research in education takes the researcher into a complex set of politically sensitive relationships, according to McDonald and Walker. These authors suggest that a number of critical issues need to be addressed:

- to whose needs and interests does the research respond?
- who owns the data?
- who has access to the data?
- what is the status of the researcher's interpretations of events, vis a vis the interpretations made by others?

- what obligations does the researcher owe to his subjects, his sponsors, his fellow professionals, others?
- who is the research for? (McDonald & Walker, 1983, p.4)

The ethical principles adopted by the Council of American Anthropological Association address issues that potentially face qualitative researchers. In part these include:

1. Where research involves the acquisition of material and information transferred on the assumption of trust between persons, it is axiomatic that the rights, interests and sensitivities of those studied must be safeguarded.
2. The aims of the investigation should be communicated as well as possible to the informant.
3. Informants have a right to remain anonymous.
4. There is an obligation to reflect on the foreseeable repercussions of research and publication on the general population being studied. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.111).

### 3.4.2 Informed Consent

To address these ethical considerations the informed consent of those participating in the study was considered to be of paramount importance. Through informed consent participants are made aware

- \* that participation was voluntary
- \* of any aspects of the research that might affect their well being
- \* that they could freely choose to stop participation at any point in the study (Diener and Crandall, 1978).

The following process outlines how the researcher offered confidentiality to informants and offered them control over the use of the information. Periodic negotiation with the sponsors of the study and program participants was undertaken to ensure that the key concepts of confidentiality, negotiation and accessibility were preserved (McDonald & Walker, 1983, p.7).

In September 1995, a proposal outlining the methodology and possible benefits of the research was presented to the Townsville Diocesan Education Council. The permission of the Council was obtained and regular monthly progress reports were given.

Permission to undertake the study was obtained from the Director of the Townsville Catholic Education Office. (Appendix One)

In October 1995, questionnaires were sent to the administration teams of each of the Catholic schools in the Diocese. Letters (Appendix Two) accompanying these questionnaires outlined the purpose of the study and the possible relevance of the material gained to a number of key policy and operational areas

was highlighted. It was stressed that schools were free to respond and that the information received would be treated confidentially. Individual schools would not be identified. The researcher attended the regional network meetings of principals during October to answer questions about the purpose of the study, its relevance and possible implications.

During October a letter (Appendix Four) was sent to parish pastoral leaders outlining the purpose of the study, its relevance to them and possible implications for future action and practice. Each pastoral leader was invited to participate in a one to one interview.. It was stressed that they would not be identified and the material obtained from the interview would be used in such a way as not to identify them. It was also stressed that they were free to refuse if they did not wish to take part, or to withdraw at a later date if they were not comfortable with the study.

### **3.4.3 Regular Feedback**

Regular feedback on the progress of the research was provided to all the participants

- a) during regular school visits
- b) in the Catholic Education Office Circular
- c) at Council of Priests' meetings
- d) in follow up letters to all participants.

In addition, those involved in the research were invited to a one day Conference in March 1996. A brief summary of the data gathered was provided (Appendix Five). At this stage participants were asked whether or not they wished to continue their participation. The aim of this interchange was to provide an opportunity:

- \* to hear some initial feedback on the research to date
- \* to discuss together the various participants' perceptions of the role of Catholic schools in the Diocese
- \* to identify key areas for further research and co-operation

It was stressed that all research material would be destroyed at the end of the study.

### **3.5 Collecting the Research Data**

As far as Greenfield is concerned, organisations do not exist in any real or ultimate sense, they are not 'out there' but rather they are inside people, and it is only through people doing things and acting out their own values that we make something real that we call organisation. Organisations are built upon purpose, upon value, but that value is "incorporated in what people are doing, so that in the way we exist, in the way we are, the very kind of people we are, we make our organisations" (Greenfield, 1984, p.6).

In the sampling of people, the researcher works from what Schatzman and Strauss describe as a “sociologically axiomatic base” that in any human organisation, people stand in different relationships to the whole of that organisation, in some important respects probably viewing it and using it differently and that these differences can be gleaned from what people say and how they act (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p.41).

If people do stand in such a relationship to an organisation as described above, then the case study format would seem to be the most effective way of conducting this research. A variety of methods were employed to gather data from school and parish personnel.

### 3.5.1 Research Data from Schools:

Written responses on current perceptions of the role of the Catholic school were sought from Administration teams in each of the primary and secondary schools in the Diocese. The instrument used was a survey entitled: *An initial exploration of current perceptions of some of the roles of the Catholic school by Catholic school administration* (Appendix Three). The initial version of the instrument was generated by Drs McLaughlin and Spry from the Australian Catholic University and myself. The instrument was trialled on over sixty teachers and administrators from every Queensland Diocese and consequently refined.

The instrument was sent to every Catholic school in the Townsville Diocese. Table 1 provides a profile of these schools.

**Table 1**  
**Profile of Schools in Townsville Diocese**

Schools		Number of Pupils
Secondary	10	3280
Primary	22	4,786

**Table 2**  
**Return rate of survey from Townsville Catholic Schools**

Primary Schools	81%
Secondary Schools	90%

### 3.5.2 Research Data from Parishes:

There are currently thirty parishes in the Diocese of Townsville. Interviews were conducted with sixteen pastoral leaders. Two others were on holidays, one on extended study leave, one had accepted

employment in a new parish in another Diocese and was unavailable and one refused the invitation to be interviewed. One parish was advertising for a new pastoral leader and one priest is currently exercising pastoral responsibility for three parishes.

Three key questions were discussed:

1. From your perspective, do you consider the Catholic school to be an important part of the mission of your parish today?
2. From your perspective, what would you like to affirm about Catholic schools today?
3. From your perspective, are there areas of concern/issues you feel that need to be addressed?

Interviews were not recorded electronically but notes were taken and read back to the interviewee at the end of the session. Those notes were edited until the interviewee felt that they represented a true summary of the opinions expressed.

### 3.5.3 Conference of Parish and School Leaders

In March this year, after all interviews had been conducted and questionnaires returned, all participants in the study were invited to a one day Conference. All participants attended the Conference and other parish leaders attended. In preparation for the day some background reading was provided.

At the Conference some initial baseline data was presented from both the questionnaires and the interviews. Various discussion sessions allowed to enable further time for parish and schools groups to explore the initial data in more depth and to provide further feedback. Groups were organised to include parish and school leadership from each area or ministerial region.

Each group was asked to examine

- a) What do we do to evangelise
  1. in our parish
  2. in our school
  3. together
  
- b) What do we do to catechize
  1. in our parish
  2. in our school
  3. together

- c) What have we heard today
1. that needs affirming
  2. that needs to be developed for further addressed  
in my local parish/school  
at Diocesan level

This data was collated and forwarded to all participants.

### 3.5.4 Visitation

The researcher regularly visited most schools as a normal part of his role as a consultant in the Catholic Education Office. The researcher observed what was occurring in the schools, for example what additional services the schools were provided to parents and to students, attendance at various school liturgies to which he was invited. Informal feedback on the questionnaire was provided by members of the school's administration team during these visits and notes were made. These notes were fed back to the school's administration team to ensure that they were an accurate record of discussions and observations.

The researcher attended Council of Priests' meetings in Townsville. Notes were made on discussions about the research and read back to the participants at the end of the meeting.

### 3.6 Timeline for the Research

September 1995	Permission sought to undertake the research study from - the Diocesan Director of the Catholic Education Office the Diocesan Education Council the Council of Priests Association of Priests and Pastoral Associates
October - December 1995	Data Collection Questionnaires sent to schools Interviews conducted with parish pastoral leaders School visits
January- February 1996	Reporting and Reflection Phase Initial feedback by letter to all participants Visit to Council of Priests Report to Diocesan Education Council Report to principals' meeting Reflection on the data

March 1996	Conference for all participants Reflection on the data Discussion on the various participants perceptions of the role of Catholic schools in the Diocese Reflection on the possible repercussions of the research data
April 1996	Data from the Conference collated and forwarded to all participants for further comment Responses invited.
May 1996	Feedback to Diocesan Education Council Possible responses and action discussed.

### 3.7 Reliability and Validity

The aim of the case study researcher is to increase understanding of the variables, parameters and dynamics of the case under study rather than seeking one true definition of the situation, for in social situations, truth is multiple" (McDonald and Walker 1983, p.7). This approach to research depends on a variety of methods for gathering data and a variety of sources. This particular case study included notes from interviews, questionnaires, and observation. "Triangulation", or using multiple data sources and methods is considered critical in establishing data trustworthiness (Burns, 1994, p.321). Triangulation was achieved by the use of observation, interview and questionnaire as well as regular feedback to participants to test the researcher's observations, interpretations and tentative conclusions. A further component was added when all participants in the study were brought together for a conference to hear the feedback first hand and to discuss that data together. The conference provided a key ingredient in the process of ensuring 'face validity' (Lather, 1986, p.270), providing all participants in the study an opportunity to respond to the data and to share perceptions. "Face validity" occurs when data, emerging analysis and conclusions are fed back to participants (Spry, 1989, p.101). This also addressed one of the essential aims of action research of improving and involving (Spry, 1989, p.103), enabling participants to be reorientated, focussed and energized thus enabling them to know reality in order to transform it (Lather, 1986, p.271). Workshops during the conference enabled participants to share common perceptions and ideas as well as to focus on possible action for the future.

To promote further trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a procedure for enlisting an outsider to 'audit' fieldwork notes and subsequent analysis and interpretations. Two fellow consultants at this office acted as 'critical friends' at various stages of data collecting and analysis. The design of the study included not only a variety of data sources and methods of collection but data was fed back to participants at regular intervals to ensure a sense of ownership and collaboration as well as accuracy of interpretation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981, p.5).



### 3.8 Overview of the Research Design

Organisations can be seen as not as structures subject to universal laws but as “cultural artifacts dependent on the specific meaning and intention of the people within them” (Greenfield, 1975, p.74). The aim of this research was to endeavour to map these ‘versions of reality’ as seen by key leaders in Catholic education today in the Diocese of Townsville, secondly to discover stresses and disjunctures that threaten these definitions and third to develop the commitment of people to new social goals and the means they consider effective in achieving them (Greenfield, 1973, p.568).

As this research is very much concerned with the direct experience of these leaders, a case study format seemed to be the most effective means of achieving the end.

A variety of approaches to data collection were used, questionnaire, interview, observation. In order to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy, the data and tentative conclusions were regularly fed back to the participants and was also subjected to scrutiny by two critical friends. Joint ownership of the data and the project itself were considered to be important, as was a sense of collaboration with participants. Feedback, regular visitation and a conference involving all participants in the study was considered to be effective means in ensuring these characteristics were promoted.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of some of the main stakeholders in Catholic education today in the Diocese of Townsville in the light of the original vision espoused by the Bishops who established the Catholic school system in Australia.

There are a number of fundamental changes occurring in the Townsville Diocese which make the examination of the role of the Catholic school today of particular relevance. The founding Bishops' vision was one of close partnership between parish, school and family. Now, however, the traditional parish structure in which the Catholic school in Australia was first developed is rapidly changing. Many of the parishes in this diocese have no priest in residence. Over fifty per cent of the parishes have new forms of leadership models. Traditional allegiances to parish are radically changing and the number of families with children at Catholic schools who regularly attend Sunday Mass where it is available is rapidly diminishing.

#### 4.1.1 Gathering Perceptions from School Leaders

As the research is concerned with the perceptions of particular people in a particular time and place, the case study method appeared to be the most appropriate means to gather this information. A questionnaire, developed in association with Drs Denis McLaughlin and Gayle Spry from the Australian Catholic University, was sent to the administration teams of each of the Catholic schools in the Diocese. The survey sought some initial data about issues currently facing Catholic schools. The letter accompanying the questionnaire stressed that schools were free to respond and highlighted the possible relevance of the material gained to a number of key policy and operational areas. 81% of primary schools returned completed questionnaires and 90% of secondary schools.

#### 4.1.2 Gathering Perceptions from Parish Leaders

Another letter was sent to parish pastoral leaders outlining the purpose of the study, its relevance to them and possible implications for future action and practice. Each pastoral leader was invited to participate in a one to one interview which would explore the role of the Catholic school today. Once again, this research sought initial, baseline data on which further study could be based.

There are currently thirty parishes in the Diocese of Townsville. Interviews were conducted with sixteen pastoral leaders. Two others were on holidays, one on extended study leave, one had accepted employment

in a new parish in another Diocese and was unavailable and one refused the invitation to be interviewed. One parish was advertising for a new pastoral leader and one priest is currently exercising pastoral responsibility for three parishes.

In addition, those involved in the research participated in a one day conference. The aim of this interchange was to provide an opportunity

- to hear and respond to some initial feedback on the research data
- to discuss together the various participants' perceptions of the role of the Catholic school in the parish
- to identify key areas for further research and cooperation.

#### **4.1.3 The Survey of Schools**

The instrument used to gather the perceptions of school leaders was a survey questionnaire entitled: *An initial exploration of current perceptions of some of the roles of the Catholic school by Catholic school administration.* (Appendix Three).

The research questions sought information in three key areas:

1. The perceived purposes of the Catholic school today
2. The changing role of the Catholic school and its relationship to parish
3. The changing evangelising roles of parish and school.

In analysing the data, in general reference will be made to two groups only: primary and secondary schools. The initial analysis did not reveal information that significantly differed for single sex schools or co-educational schools.

## **4.2 Section One: The Perceived Purposes of a Catholic School**

**4.2.1 Question 1:** *What do you think is the purpose of the Catholic School in your geographical area?*

### **Primary:**

The first clear indication of a change in thinking comes from the responses made by the primary school administration teams, perhaps best summarised in the observation that “we need to be church in a different way in this community.” The primary schools see themselves as faith communities in their own right, as it were. Responses indicated that many schools were conscious of the fact that “the Catholic school is the only contact with church that the children in the school have.” Thus respondents repeatedly indicated the need “to evangelize”, to build a truly Christian community based on gospel values or, as one

school administration team outlined “the mission of the school is to act as a gathering place to work together, to celebrate together and reflect on our Christian mission”.

Most of the schools picked up the theme of being Christian community and the need “to be a basic Christian community where our faith tradition is celebrated”. Only two responses mentioned the word ‘parish’, a rather radical change from the vision espoused by the Bishops of the 1860s. A further subtle change as far as parish is concerned is that both these administration teams actually saw their school as the focal point of parish. For example, one administration team indicated that it was the school’s role to “develop a sense of community in the parish”. To further underscore this point, the other administration team envisaged its school as the focal point for liaison between parish and families.

#### **Secondary:**

Recognizing the school “as the only contact with church for many students” was a theme continued by the secondary school administration teams and thus the school “being a faith community” seemed to be an almost logical consequence. “Providing a new vision of Church” was a key priority for one school and others saw the Christian caring climate of the school as being extremely important.

Characteristics of this faith community were outlined. For example, the Christian or Catholic educational environment was an important aspect of secondary education, providing “a Catholic education where Catholic values are continually part of the day”. This vision seemed to be in accord with that espoused by the Bishops of the 1860s and 1870s, for whom the Catholic atmosphere and practices ought to pervade the entire school day and the practices of the school. However, there was no real attempt to define what was meant by “Catholic values” and the terms “Catholic” and “Christian” were interchanged quite frequently. Excellence in education, “catering for the needs of the whole person” and providing a range of alternatives which challenged the students were also key priorities for secondary schools.

A number of schools mentioned catering for isolated students and serving the poor and the rural communities. Only one respondent mentioned providing religious education for the students in the school!

#### **4.2.2 Question 2: *What important differences do you perceive between your school and government and other non-government schools in your area?***

#### **Primary:**

Our school strives to keep the gospel message as its focus and all activities stem from this. Government schools have a different basis from which they work and this affects what they do. This school is seen as a more caring school

Perhaps that quotation summarizes the main themes of all the responses to this question.

The fact that all the school's activities, the basis of the educational program, the basis of the atmosphere that the school endeavoured to create were all founded on the gospel or "gospel values" was repeatedly mentioned by respondents. Because of this seminal priority, schools were seen as having a strong pastoral emphasis. In recognition "of Jesus and the Good News" emphasis on the community and "on the value of the community aspect of the school", of the value and the worth of each individual were high on the list of priorities in all respondents.

Again the fact that the school was a faith community embracing not only students and teachers but involving parents as well was recognized repeatedly by the administration teams of these primary schools. The development of this faith community was enhanced by fact that schools were "independent" as it were, enabling them to be able to promote Christian practice in the school and to be very overt about the motivations regarding various fundamental activities within the school. This independence also enabled prayer and liturgy to be celebrated. It is interesting to note just how strongly this latter theme pervades the thinking of both primary and secondary administration teams. It is, indeed, a gradual yet significant change in thinking and practice. Catholic schools have always included prayer as an integral part of the school day but the responses highlighted the fact that the celebration of liturgies for all in the school community, perhaps traditionally regarded as the responsibility of the parish, is becoming a higher priority and a more common practice.

There were other spin-offs from promoting the schools as faith communities. The Catholic school was able to be more tolerant and caring for each individual child, the "sense of discipline" was seen to be stronger. Pastoral care was seen as not only extending to students but to teachers and parents as well. A number of schools mentioned the schools ability to be able to exercise pastoral care for parents and families particularly in times of special need and stress. The vital need for parental assistance and help was also recognized, not only as one school put it "in paying fees" but there was still a need for continued support for parents to be involved in the school for the economic viability of that school. Again an interesting feature of the responses is that parish is only mentioned once, sacramental celebrations are only mentioned twice in all the primary responses yet close cooperation between school and family is mentioned in over fifty percent of the responses.

#### **Secondary:**

The Catholic school as a Christian faith community was also a feature of the secondary responses. This was highlighted in

- \* the pastoral care of students being a very significant priority in the secondary school sector. Almost all responses indicated that pastoral care was in practice seen in the ongoing care and support of the students.
- \* The priority to make class sizes as small as possible, the diversity of curriculum and the discipline policies of the schools.

- \* The Catholic ethos of the schools, the structure of the school based on gospel values.
- \* The religious background or atmosphere of the school was seen to be another integral component in a successful Catholic secondary school.
- \* The fact that Religious Education classes, liturgies, assembly prayers were a feature of each day was seen as also being extremely important.

Only one school mentioned the gender of the students, “as a single sex boys school we try to address specific needs of boys”. In general, however, the responses show no difference between boys schools and girls schools. A good active discipline system based on gospel values, a good academic curriculum and an active faith community operating in the structures of the school were all seen as keen elements which made Catholic secondary school different from their counter parts.

**4.2.3 Question 3:** *What are the most important reasons given for sending their children to your school?*

**Primary:**

In one primary school the enrolment form asks that specific question. According to the administration team of that school the following are the priorities for parents choosing to send their children to that school:

1. Discipline
2. The Religion taught to the children
3. The fact that there is a quality education available
4. The extra curriculum activities which the child is exposed to at the school.

Other respondents agreed in general with those priorities and there was a significant number of respondents who added “a caring atmosphere”. While many acknowledged that their schools were rather small and therefore were capable of giving more individual attention to the students, almost every respondent indicated that they felt that parents chose Catholic education because of the caring and “Catholic atmosphere” of education in the school. Another school indicated that parents wanted what they termed, “a Catholic atmosphere of education”. This seemed to translate into more discipline and the perception that they felt that the children in Catholic schools were exposed to less bullying than in other schools. Other reasons given for parents enrolling their children included the good reputation that the school enjoys, the good academic standards and the good behaviour that the students portrayed to the local community.

The fact that the staff were perceived to be more caring and perhaps enjoyed strong community themselves and among themselves were seen as a very positive advantage by over half of respondents. Faith education figured very strongly in the responses, in fact almost seventy five per cent of the respondents indicated that parents chose Catholic primary schools not only because of the atmosphere, the discipline, the perceived

good standard of education, but faith education was singled out as a key reason why parents chose Catholic primary schools. The change in terminology from religious education to faith education was an interesting feature of responses, perhaps reflecting not only the change in clientele from “churched to unchurched” parents and students and the greater emphasis on evangelisation, but also the growing number of parents and students whose only experience of church is through the school and its activities.

It is also interesting to note that one school indicated that the active involvement of the parish priest in school activities was also a positive force as to why the parents chose the Catholic school for their children. The ability for the community to become involved in the school, particularly the parents also figured quite strongly in the responses of the administration teams. In contrast, four administration teams felt that their school was chosen because it provided a good, cheap, private education.

### **Secondary:**

Much the same responses were indicated by the administration teams in secondary schools. Better discipline, the family atmosphere, the small and thus very person centered school and the strong pastoral care and good discipline were mentioned by also every school administration team. The school reputation and the fact that the parents themselves went to that school were also important motivators.

Only two responses indicated that parents are choosing Catholic secondary schools as a cheap alternative to private school system, and some responses suggested that some parents chose Catholic schools mainly because there was perceived lack of discipline in state high schools and a sense of confusion in those schools. Thus parents were looking for other alternatives.

## **4.3 Section Two: The changing role of the Catholic school today and its relationship to Parish**

### **4.3.1 Question 4: *Estimate what percentage of your parents would attend the Saturday night, Sunday worship weekly if such is available to them.***

The results indicated that in the opinion of the schools leadership team, the large majority of parents who send their children to Catholic schools do not practice regularly. In the opinion of the primary school administration teams only 20% of parents attended Saturday night/Sunday worship on a weekly basis. Interestingly, secondary school administration teams estimated that 29% of parents attended weekly worship.

**4.3.2 Question 5:** *If the opportunity is available, please estimate the percentage of persons who would regularly attend school/class organised worship.*

Primary school responses indicated that 28% of parents would avail themselves of the opportunity to join school/class organised worship on a regular basis, and 20% of secondary schools parents were estimated to want to take advantage of such an option.

**4.3.3 Question 6:** *If there is a discrepancy between the results of questions 4 & 5, please comment.*

**Primary:**

Parents and other family members are attracted to school liturgies because they felt more involved, particularly if their own child is participating, according to most respondents. Although a number of schools cited changing working hours as possible reasons why parents don't attend Sunday worship regularly, it would seem more likely from the responses that "un-churched parents feel more comfortable in the school environment. There is a greater sense of connection or community". This feeling of involvement and connectedness was a key theme and a number of schools indicated that non Catholic parents certainly felt much more part of the worship at the school celebration. The fact that this participation decreased as the child progressed to the upper year levels was commented on by a number of respondents.

The inflexibility of parish Sunday liturgies was also a factor explaining this discrepancy for some communities. This inflexibility was not simply concerned with times of celebrations not fitting in with the changing lifestyles and demands of work, but with the ritual itself. School liturgies appear to be more adapted to local needs and local communities. According to one school administration team, "people don't see the need for Sunday Eucharist, it doesn't touch life experience". That response would seem to summarise many of the perceptions across the Diocese.

**Secondary:**

Parental or family participation in liturgies as far as secondary schools are concerned appears to be limited to the special events such as the Opening of the School Year liturgy or Graduation Liturgies.

The fact that "student liturgy has a special vibrancy" was noted as a contributing factor but others suggested that "we rarely have a class liturgy that would be suitable for parental attendance." While that may be because parents are at work at this time, others suggested that many secondary schools may think that this type of support is only needed in the primary school.



**4.3.4 Question 7: *What areas of advice - care do you provide to students other than curriculum, career and classroom behaviour.***

**Primary:**

The main area of additional support provided for students was in area of counselling. A wide variety of areas were included - bereavement support, assistance with personal decision making, counselling with family relationships, family counselling, marriage breakup or when serious illness or bereavement occurs within the family.

A number of schools indicated that they provided additional assistance with conflict resolution skills to students both inside the school situation and addressing home situations as well. Many schools offered more tangible support. For example, almost 30% of schools offered extra support such as the so called "baby-sitting of students" in that they care for students who are dropped early at school or who are picked up quite late in the afternoon after work. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were provided with tutoring and a number of schools indicated that home visits were an integral part of their pastoral care program.

**Secondary:**

This question did not attract the detailed responses provided by the primary sector but counselling services were a feature of these extra activities or advice and care provided by the school. Counselling services included such areas as personal relationships, sex education, conflict resolution, counselling in times of bereavement or other crisis. Secondary schools indicated that retreats and camps were a special feature where areas of advice and care were given to students.

**4.3.5 Question 8: *Do you perceive students using school personnel for this purpose as well as other church people? Please elaborate:***

Perhaps this response from one of the schools best summarizes the response in the primary area:

our perception is that teachers and administrators are the main personnel students use as parish and other church personnel are not known to the students. Students will search out people they trust

One other school administration team responded in this way:

" sometimes the teachers are:

- a) the stable element in the life of the child at that time
- b) trusted friends who will give advice and support
- c) they are seen as people who know where help can be obtained"

There were a number of other key observations. One school indicated were their only source of help as there are no other church people in that area. Other schools responded by indicating how inadequate staff feel in the number of areas where students approach them. Children often feel uncomfortable about approaching staff about problems whilst staff also feel inadequate to offer much help yet one respondent suggested that "I would say that students see teachers as their model hence the vital importance to have good models as teachers".

### **Secondary:**

Only five secondary schools responded to this question. None of them indicated that students approach "church" people. The reasons underlying this situation were not explored in any depth. One school indicated that "many of the students search out particular teachers as mentors" and another suggested that the students will seek people they know and trust. This seems to confirm responses to other questions which indicate that pastors or "church people" are not known to the students, firstly because so few are available and secondly because "church people" are not involved enough in secondary schools to develop this relationship. Responses from pastors outlined below indicate that their role in secondary schools is largely as liturgical leader. Few of our secondary schools employ full-time counsellors so it appeared that other school personnel are used a lot.

## **4.4 Section Three: The changing evangelising roles of Catholic School and Parish**

### **4.4.1 Question 9: *What areas of advice/care do you provide to parents?***

This was the most extensively answered question out of the entire 15. Almost every school filled up the entire space provided and some included an additional sheet of paper so that their questions would be answered in appropriate detail. Schools listed the following as areas of advice and care provided to parents:

- support to parents who have children with behaviour problems
- one to one care with individual parents, providing a listening ear
- financial advice
- parenting skills
- the school acts as a referral agency when needed to other more appropriate institutions or services
- providing articles about parenting, child raising, behaviour
- personal relationships between spouses and other parents
- how to handle stress
- providing assistance with crisis care. eg death of friend or family member
- providing advice and information regarding other service providers

- advice on homework and study skills
- providing advice in times of job crisis or job loss
- how to find their way back to participation in the life of the church

Perhaps this quotation summarizes many of the responses:

Teachers can be called upon to provide advice on just about any area of home life to parents. What do you tell a father at 7.50am in the morning when he rings tells you his wife has left him for another man overnight

There is a strong underlying theme throughout the responses about the lack of time and the lack of professional expertise in the area of counselling and “providing the aid and support that is required of the teachers in a modern day Catholic school”.

#### **Secondary:**

The responses to secondary schools were remarkably similar to those of primary schools. In fact, the list of issues addressed in the counselling services undertaken by the schools were virtually the same. The only significant area of difference from the primary school was counselling services for adolescence behaviour and development which was included in most responses. Counselling for career options was another important area of care for the students. A number of schools indicated the priority that they have to ensure “easy access for parents for interviews or for counselling especially in times of stress or at times when they need advice on career or faith development”.

**4.4.2 Question 10:** *Do you perceive parents using the school personnel this purpose as well as other church personnel? Please elaborate:*

#### **Primary:**

For many, if not for most parents there is very little contact with church people, according to the perceptions of administrations teams. Once again perhaps a sign of the times in the Townsville Diocese is that a number of schools simply indicated “they have no other church personnel to call on here”. Others indicated that when church personnel do visit, parents only use them very rarely and only when the school has initiated the contact.

Many parents approach teachers in faith matters now rather than the parish, according to a number of respondents; “their first point of contact will be school personnel as these people are a constant in their lives”. Another responded that they didn’t know how nor how many parents access other church people but added, rather significantly

I perceive that the Catholic school is the first and only contact with church for many parents. School personnel are often approached before other people, because they are often the most highly qualified and experienced

### Secondary:

Secondary responses were again remarkably similar. As one respondent indicated

if a trust relationship has been established between parents and staff then the parents will confide in staff

Many in the secondary school arena felt unable to answer that question, in fact only four responses were received for this question.

**4.4.3 Question 11:** *Does your school provide assistance to needy students with such items as uniforms, text books, breakfast? Others please describe.*

### Primary:

Most respondents indicated that they provided either complete or partial fee relief as well as providing second hand uniforms, text books, subsidy for excursions and camps. Two schools indicated that they were beginning to provide meals for a number of students:

Food is provided to students who are known to have limited home resources and who come to school empty handed

Another school indicated that "important assistance is given by way of listening and seeking to truly understand the student's need".

**4.4.4 Question 12:** *Is your school used for local community activities?*

The following activities were noted:

- church and parish activities and related organisations
- adult education
- music camps
- cultural events
- drama groups
- wedding celebrations
- TAFE classes
- social events organised by parents
- sporting groups
- School Of Distance Education

The overall responses indicated that schools were used extensively by the local community, not just the local parish community.

**4.4.5 Question 13:** *What other experiences of Church do you think the majority of your students have?*

**Primary:**

Seventeen primary schools responded to this question, ten of whom indicated that students had little or no contact with church apart from what was provided at school. For the majority of students school liturgies and masses were their main experience of church, apart from their exposure to church via such sacramental events as baptisms of siblings and friends, weddings and perhaps for a very limited number weekly mass.

Some families had contact with such agencies as the St Vincent De Paul society and other schools indicated that what they termed "as minority prayer groups" (Rosary groups, Magnificat Meal movement groups) were also contacts with church for a limited number of students. Three schools indicated that their local parishes organize camps and excursions and some of their students were involved in these activities. Apart from that there was very little exposure to church in the primary school area.

**Secondary:**

In secondary school the picture is depressingly similar. The following response was very typical of all responses from the secondary schools

Yes most definitely, in most cases the input from the school is the parents' only experience of church whether they claim they are Catholic or not

One school highlighted the point that their main activity is learning, "we are not an alternative to church".

**4.4.6 Question 14:** *In your opinion is the school the main experience of church for the majority of parents?*

**Primary:**

The overwhelming response to this question might best be summarised in this response:

Yes, most parents have little or no contact with formal church structures but they do participate when specifically invited to at school level. Most are very conscious of their lack of knowledge and feel very insecure

Another school indicated that

The post Vatican-II parents and their changing approach to things church (parish) share their church experiences with their children by participating in school based/community liturgical and secular celebrations. These celebration enable a sense of belonging, are less threatening, have a social aspect and parents feel welcomed as members of the school community

Another typical response was that parents only get to know the church through the school as “the commencement of a child at school is the first contact with religion/church that a parents has had for a number of years”.

The eighteen responses to this question were unanimous - the school is indeed the main experience of church for the majority of parents.

#### **Secondary:**

The secondary school experience was virtually the same as for primary. One school queried the definition of “experience”, adding that it was difficult to address this question in the boarding school context.

#### **4.4.7 Question 15: *Does your school provide faith education programs for Parents?***

For secondary schools the answer was unanimously “no”. For primary schools responses were mixed although there seemed to be a growing awareness of some sense of responsibility in this area. Some faith sharing is obviously undertaken at parent gatherings such as P&F meetings and some schools indicated that parents are invited to participate in their children’s Religious Education Course. The main avenue of adult/parent faith education was now through the Parish based sacramental programs, although as one school noted “although the program is parish based in name, in reality it is significantly school driven”.

The school newsletter is quite obviously seen as an important vehicle for faith development followed by information nights about the RE program, magazines and books made available on request.

#### **4.4.8 Question 16: *Please draw a diagram to illustrate the school/parish and local community relationship at your school.***

#### **Primary:**

The results of this question were quite confusing as the diagrams were sometimes at odds with the answers supplied to the written questions and at times it was difficult to decipher the underlying reality illustrated by the diagrams.

*Model 1* indicates that parish is the focal point for most church activities. Only three of the sixteen schools teams who responded to this question indicated that this was the reality for their community. The three schools belonged to small, rural parishes.

*Model 2* illustrates that the reality appears to be a much greater sense of partnership or interaction with both parish and school working in relative harmony. Some written comments included with the diagrams indicated that schools involve many who have no contact with the parish, the unchurched and those who are not Catholic for example. Perhaps one striking feature of many of the diagrams in this section was the amount of activity undertaken by schools and parishes. In some diagrams it appeared that little or nothing was happening in these communities, whereas in others a very impressive array of community programs were offered.

*Model 3* represents the school as the major initiator of church experiences, although there does appear to be some linkage with parish. One school supplied a written response which may help clarify the diagram:

- \* the most significant relationship exists between school and community
- \* there is minimal interaction by school and community with the parish group
- \* church involvement is often initiated by school personnel

Only two schools, however, responded in this vein.

#### **Secondary:**

Few attempted this exercise. Some schools wrote responses such as "if the above is the ideal with parish at the centre, we are fooling ourselves if we think the reality if anything like this". Another wrote that the parish would certainly not be at the centre but "rather you would put the school at the centre and other areas emanating from there".

Two schools submitted diagrams, one with the parish at the centre, the other with a rather confused and confusing array of activities and organisations but the diagram appeared to indicate that parish and school shared equal status.

#### **4.5 Pastoral Leaders Perceptions**

Interviews were conducted with sixteen pastoral leaders throughout the Diocese over a period of ten weeks. Interviews were not recorded electronically but notes were taken at the interview and read back to the interviewee for confirmation at the end of the session. Since those interviews and the conference of school and pastoral leaders, a number of pastors have written to clarify and stress key points. The researcher has visited Council of Priests meetings to discuss tentative results and follow up visits to many of the pastors have taken place.

Three questions or areas of focus were identified in the interviews

1. The role of the Catholic school today in the mission of the local church
2. Areas of concern or issues that needed to be addressed by further research or action
3. Key priorities for the future

#### 4.5.1 *Question 1: The role of the Catholic school in the mission of the local church*

Many, if not most of those who responded indicated that they still saw an important place for Catholic schools in the mission of the parish. "The parish without a Catholic school is the poorer for it", according to a number of pastors. But the overall response was one which indicated a sense of questioning and even confusion as to the nature and purpose of the Catholic school today. One parish priest summed it up this way.

Schools are undergoing radical change just as society is undergoing radical change. We need to be aware that we are asking big questions like 'What does it mean to be Catholic today?' If 75% of Catholics don't practice their faith then what does it mean to be a Catholic? Is it still worth being a Catholic?

Another pastor suggested that we are all struggling with the real issue of what it means to be Catholic today and that "everyone is working out of a different vision of what being Catholic today means and what being Catholic today involves."

Another highlighted the fact society itself is undergoing some sort of identity crisis:

The church and contemporary society will always be changing and growing and developing, the Catholic school is part of the search for identify that the parish and the wider society is also undergoing. What it means to be Catholic is no longer clear and schooling is experiencing a drift away from the traditional loyalties of practice and teaching just as the parish is

Two other tensions emerged. Firstly, in contrast to the Bishop's original vision most of the pastors saw the school as one of the missions of the local church and perhaps not as in years passed, the principle mission of that church. A number of pastors suggested that Catholic schools are now competing for very scarce funds and resourcing from the parish and this is leading to greater tensions and greater questioning about the role of the school and possibly even in some cases the need for the school.

The second tension could perhaps be described as the passing of "the village school". This passing was a major theme that emerged in that it was stressed at the interviews, at the conference and in later contact with pastors. Most of the clergy indicated that they now feel somewhat ill at ease in the Catholic school in their parish. While many hastened to stress that they felt welcome by staff and by principals they considered that, unlike the old days when they were able to move with ease in and out of classrooms, greeting students and parents by name, that was no longer the case. "The school is no longer the village school", lamented one pastor, because such a significant proportion of parents are not practising or not



Catholic or they do not belong to that particular parish. In general, the pastor did not feel that he or she enjoyed the same sort of relationship that was clearly evident in the past. This changing relationship also appeared to be bound up with the search for an identity for the pastor as well. While parishes now involve many more people in a variety of ministries, this has caused an identity crisis for many ordained clergy in particular. For a significant number of them, focusing on their role as liturgical leader particularly in the celebration of sacraments, enabled them to maintain their understanding of the uniqueness of their role. But, as one pastor suggested, allowing teachers to lead liturgies and paraliturgies was "a big mistake". Children, parents and teachers may no longer always see the priest in that unique leadership role - in fact, several pastors wondered what role, if any these people actually considered them to have.

For others, however, the role of the Catholic school was quite clearly that of handing on the faith. "The role of the school is to hand on Catholic beliefs and practices", according to one pastor, and the partnership between school and parish is "one of divine origin". For those few pastors who were clearly out of step with the responses of others, "the parish and the school have not changed their role in a hundred years".

#### *4.5.2 Question 2: Areas of Concern or Issues that need to be addressed*

This confusion as to the nature and purpose of Catholic schools today was clearly evident in the three key areas of concern repeatedly raised by the pastors:

- a) why parents enrol their sons and daughters in Catholic schools
- b) who should be accepted into the Catholic school today, in other words what should our enrolment policy be?
- c) the ministry of teaching in a Catholic school

{a} Why do parents enroll their students in Catholic schools?

In many cases the choice of the Catholic school was simply a matter of "good people seeking good values" according to one pastor's perception, whereas others indicated that they felt that the Catholic school system may simply be becoming a cheap form of private schooling and that the faith education of students was a much lower priority than it had been in years past. In contrast, another pastor indicated that 'our apostolate is not to those who come with a baptismal certificate in one hand and a pledge in the other' yet he also lamented the fact that most of the families enrolled in his school were not practicing - at an optimistic guess he suggested that 20% of those who attended his Catholic school would be considered to be practicing.

Another fairly typical response was outlined by one pastor in these terms:

The Catholic people see less and less connection between the school and the Catholic church. More and more parents are enrolling their students without a thought for the church or for Religious Education.

{b} Clarity on enrolment policy

Pastors clearly indicated that they wished to have some sort of clarity developed as far as an enrolment policy was concerned. Reactions to current enrolment policies were very varied. Some felt that the number of non-Catholics in the school mitigated against the teaching of Catholic doctrine and the celebration of Catholic rituals. "Too large a percentage of non-Catholics will affect the philosophical basis of our schools", wrote one pastor, "we are still school of type and have the right to set the parameters". Another suggested that "at 13% of non-Catholic enrolment in our schools, the teachers are noted to begin modifying their teaching of Catholicism to the students". In contrast, others felt that, if we accepted non Catholics then they should be welcomed into our schools. In reality, however, we did little or nothing to make them feel welcome or to feel part of our traditions and our rituals. As one pastor suggested:

the whole area of ecumenism needs to be addressed in our enrolment policy and we need to look at what quality of faith people are bringing into the school. In recent years in my parish-and in boarding schools attached to my parish I have been preaching Christianity rather than pursuing the specific teachings of the Catholic church. Those specific teachings need to be treated elsewhere

In a rather radical change from tradition that pastor suggested that he hoped our schools would get the name of being Christian faith developers rather than Catholic faith developers. But this was the minority view. In general "we want to teach Catholics if we can", was the prevailing, underlying sentiment although most recognised the economic reality that quite a number of our schools would be closed if we adhered to that underlying principle too rigidly.

{c} The Ministry of Teaching in a Catholic school

All those interviewed returned repeatedly to "the faith of the teachers in the school". It was, quite obviously, a matter of particular concern to them. Most of them lamented the fact that so many of the teachers, particularly the young teachers, were no longer practicing their faith. While these teachers in schools were very welcoming, very hospitable and very caring more than that was expected of them. Two pastors indicated if "we talk about Catholic teaching as being a ministry, then these teachers in the local Catholic school are parish ministers, but where are they on Sundays?"

One pastor suggested that we are 'trading on the past', in that many principals are either religious or ex-religious. But as he suggested, we can't bank on that sort of formation any longer. In fact to quote him again 'when I look towards the future and when I look toward the next generation of school leaders, I find it quite scary'.

### 4.5.3 Question 3: Key Priorities for the Future

This apparent change in commitment by teachers, coupled with the recognition that for many if not most of our students schools represents their only experience of church, highlighted some important priorities.

#### 1. Training Leaders for Catholic Education

The need to be proactive in developing our teachers and in particular, developing leadership in our schools rather than waiting till the principal is appointed before we train them were key issues raised by a number of pastors. “We need to be selecting key people and offering them training in scripture and Catholic ethos and in Christian Leadership long before they aspire to become a principal”, one pastor suggested. The importance of leadership in the school was obviously a critical area of concern. “The key to the Catholic school is the principal. He or she must be able to communicate effectively to the community if the church is going to be real to this particular school community. It must be a model of social justice. It must be seen to be just.” Another pastor suggested that he would regard his school as being successful as a Catholic school but would largely be due to the fact that the leadership of the school is so extraordinary. “They create a wonderful atmosphere at the school and the modeling of friendship and concern to the teachers is quite extraordinary. That permeates down to the kids where their attitude of care for each other is something that is a great example”.

#### 2. Preparing Teachers for Catholic schools

Another key theme repeated often by almost every pastor was that “many of our teachers don’t know the Catholic ethos or Catholic tradition and have very little knowledge of the faith”. It is in this area that pastors felt that a major shift is occurring and a great sense of unease and concern was clearly evident in all the interviews. Many spoke of the need for much more training in theology and an appreciation of “where we have come from”. The responsibility for providing this training in theology and developing a Catholic tradition and ethos was clearly seen as the responsibility of the Catholic Education Office. “Catholic schools need committed teachers”, according to one pastor, “but committed teachers doesn’t simply mean practicing teachers but informed teachers who have a mature growing faith in Jesus and his teachings and the Catholic faith”.

Others stressed that we are not simply looking for teachers who just go to Mass on Sunday. The teachers need an understanding and an appreciation of our tradition and where we have come from. Another pastor suggested that we need to be continually asking ourselves how can we bring the Good News into this institution. In his opinion the role of the Catholic school is shifting away from instructing children in their faith. It is shifting to enabling the people and the students to meet Jesus Christ and to experience the key values taught by Jesus when he preached about the Kingdom of God.

One pastor issued the challenge in these terms: “Are we still teaching them to get out of the ghetto or are we educating them for a lifestyle which challenges the values around us?”.

### 3. Primary and Secondary Schools

One other key area which began to emerge was the difference between primary schools and the secondary schools. In fact, many singled out the primary school system as a wonderful faith community which, in a rather ironic twist, one pastor suggested that he would like to see expanded to include education not only of the children but of the parents as well so that the parish school could become “the vital resource for the faith development of parents as well”. But as far as secondary schools are concerned a number of pastors felt that they “lacked a religious commitment. They have great RE syllabuses but something is not getting through”. The blame was not the school’s alone because parents tended to hand their children over and not support the faith development programs. But sadly there appeared to be a lack commitment by a number of secondary school teachers. But how much this opinion of secondary schools was due to the unfamiliarity and even unease of the pastor with adolescent faith development is an issue some pastors suggested may be worth further investigation.

Secondary schools need to be much more proactive in preparing the students “for the new church”, according to one parish leader. In reality this meant that schools will need to become much more self sufficient financially. Parishes will have to find money to pay for lay leadership and that means much less money for schools than at present. Secondly schools need to be very actively preparing for the day “when no priest will be available for Mass and for the hundred and one other things they do around the school and the parish”. The pastor stressed the need for teaching students new ways to pray and new ways to gather and new ways to share scripture. “In the last 10 years,” he said, “I have experienced some beautiful liturgies prepared by teachers both in the church and in the school. We need to be preparing not only our teachers to be able to become leaders of liturgy but also teaching our students to be able to prepare liturgies and lead liturgies.”

#### 4.6 Conference of Parish and School Leadership Teams

After all interviews had been conducted and questionnaires returned, all participants in the study were invited to a one day Conference to discuss the initial baseline data from the interviews and the questionnaires and to identify areas for further consideration and action. A number of other parish leaders joined those who had participated in the research.

Discussion sessions allowed further time for leaders from both parish and schools groups to explore the initial data in more depth and to provide further feedback. Groups were organised to include parish and school leadership from each parish or ministerial region. Ministerial regions have been created in the Diocese to include a number of parishes in a particular region - a variety of leadership models exist in these regions and ordained clergy may celebrate Eucharist in different parishes as these parishes are served by lay leadership.

Each group was asked to examine

- a) What do we do to evangelise.
  1. in our parish
  2. in our school
  3. together

Evangelisation was defined by the facilitator of the Conference, Bishop Michael Putney, as *any activity by which the Gospel is proclaimed and explained and therefore living faith is awakened. For Catholics therefore, to evangelise means to bring to the world of people and events faith in God's saving love made visible in Jesus.*

- b) What do we do to catechize
  1. in our parish
  2. in our school
  3. together

Catechesis was defined by Bishop Putney as *any activity for those who have heard and accepted the Word of God. Catechesis therefore seeks to foster this faith, not just by learning doctrines but also by religious socialisation into the Christian community.*

- c) What is there from what we have heard today
  1. that needs affirming
  2. that needs to be developed for further addressed  
in my local parish/school  
at Diocesan level

#### 4.6.1 Evangelisation

Initially parish and school leadership groups met separately. The activities compiled under each heading can be categorised under four key headings:

- social gatherings and events, with significant emphasis on welcoming and hospitality
- sacramental preparation and liturgical celebrations
- Religious Education lessons
- Welfare activities, especially through agencies such as St Vincent de Paul.

The first and most obvious observation is the similarity of the activities which were compiled quite independently by parish and school leaders. In fact, there appeared to be significant duplication in the activities undertaken by both parish and school. While it is acknowledged that perhaps both agencies may be serving different groups, it is quite obvious, however, that school activities have increased quite dramatically. For example, what could perhaps be described as welfare activities (home visitation, counselling, pastoral care for families, relief for those in need through fee reductions, providing uniforms and books and so on) were significant features of modern Catholic school life.

For both parish and school welcoming and hospitality activities figured prominently and school liturgies were seen as key “community builders” not only within the school but for parents, children and others in the wider community. According to school leaders, this involvement in school liturgies was probably the only experience of ritual and liturgy for most parents.

While the school’s religious education program was seen as an important tool for evangelisation, the community life of the school, the pastoral care for all in the school community, the sense of welcoming and celebration were acknowledged as important features.

#### **School and parish groups joined to explore what they did together to evangelise**

The first call from almost every group was to provide ongoing mechanisms to develop a “sense of joint ministry, a sense of unity in the local church” between those working in the parish and in the school. There was strong endorsement of the opportunity provided by this conference to explore their roles together and it was quite obvious that for the leadership teams of most parish and schools groups, this was their first meeting together. It is interesting to note that since this conference, parish and school leadership teams in two regions have met regularly each term to discuss issues of common concern. The need for the parish leader to be more involved in the school was highlighted by many groups and all groups raised the issue of encouraging teachers to be more involved in the local parish.

The celebration of sacraments and other liturgies were the first and foremost areas of cooperation. However, a tension emerged in sacramental preparation and celebration. The Diocese is moving towards parishes owning the preparation and celebration of sacraments and while that has been very successful in a number of parishes, in reality there is still a heavy reliance on school personnel to take the leadership of the parish program. For some participants, this was a source of tension. Schools were seen as well funded resources, far more financial than the local parish. Parish personnel looked to the school and its resources (including the teachers) to supplement the parish rather than the school drawing off much needed and increasingly scarce resources for the parish. The issue of parish involvement by the teachers remains an unresolved area of concern.

#### **4.6.2 Catechesis**

Once again, parish leadership and school leadership groups met separately and compiled lists of examples of ways in which the parish and the school exercised their ministry to catechise. Once again the lists were virtually the same. Each group indicated that these activities were critical in their ministry of catechesis:

- sacramental preparation and celebration
- celebration of rituals and prayer for both adults and children
- adult faith education
- retreats and camps

Parish groups, however, added other key activities such as the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, Saturday morning classes in Religious Education for children attending State schools, and the involvement of adults in leadership in the parish through such organisations as the Parish Pastoral Council.

Schools highlighted the religious education program as an integral component of catechesis but most acknowledged that their main focus is now on evangelisation.

Once again, duplication of activities was quite evident but it would seem that, as with the activities designed to foster evangelisation, each group is largely serving different communities.

#### **4.7 What do we do to catechise together?**

A new feature which emerged at this stage in the discussion was the recognition that each group operated from an emerging common vision, one based on the common foundation of the Gospel. While the fact that most places shared common facilities and that in itself forged some form of unity, the underlying gospel values which motivated each group was the stronger link which needed further exploration.

Both parish and school leadership were strong in their belief that both needed to work together to create 'a welcoming and hospitable environment for all who came in contact with school or parish'.

The recognition of the need for adult faith formation and education by each group and the attempts by parish and school to address "this critical need" were also seen as key areas for further cooperation.

Sacramental preparation and celebrations of sacraments and rituals were listed by every group as areas for continued cooperation. The school mass, children's Liturgy of the Word in some parishes were singled out as important in the joint ministry of catechesis. The Sacramental program was highlighted by every group. Yet it is in this area that difficulties and tension have emerged.

Sacramental preparation has, for many years, been the responsibility of the parish but in effect it has been a function carried out for the parish by the Catholic school. As the change from school to parish takes place some parishes have questioned whether they are equipped to undertake this responsibility. Others are concerned that parents are not able to prepare their children adequately and that many don't bother. So an increasing number of children are not receiving the sacraments or are 'ill prepared to do so'.

Others wrestle with the concept of the sacraments as celebrations of the Christian community. If particular families no longer belong to a parish community, should they be invited to celebrate the sacraments at that community or is the school their faith community?

The school as a faith community is also under discussion. If the main thrust of the Catholic school is evangelisation, is the celebration of Eucharist appropriate? Is the school community ready and able to celebrate sacraments? Some schools have decided that the celebration of Eucharist is inappropriate for

that community, leading to significant tension between some staff, some parents and the local pastor. In contrast, one pastor has made a similar decision for the parish school and only celebration of the Liturgy of the Word is permissible. Similar tension has arisen. While sacramental celebrations were listed as a significant area of continued cooperative catechesis, in reality the picture for many is quite different.

#### **4.8 An overview of the Key Findings**

Conference participants commented that this was a valuable opportunity for discussion between school and parish leadership. It was also quite clearly evident that this was the first such opportunity for many of those present. There appears to be little discussion between these two leadership groups and, although meetings are regularly scheduled between pastor and principal, the subject matter usually focuses on organisational or financial arrangements. In fact, each group seemed almost unaware of what the other was doing at times. Each acknowledged that the other was very busy so there was a reluctance to call on each other's time. Each group acknowledged that their roles had changed but neither appeared to have much understanding of what those changes had involved for the other leader in their parish. Pastors appeared quite surprised at how much the school's role had grown particularly in areas such as counselling and social welfare. Each was acutely aware, however, that changes would effect them greatly in the future, particularly as fewer parishes would be staffed by priests. There also appeared to be genuine relief that discussions had been so amicable as there was some apprehension from both groups in the lead up to the conference.

This lack of dialogue was a significant contributing factor to the lack of clarity about the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling today. Both leadership groups readily acknowledged that both parish and school find themselves in very different circumstances and times and that both are involved in exploring what it means to be Catholic today. In reality, however, many pastors' expectations of schools had changed little and the traditional criteria for success (attendance at Mass, involvement in parish, reception of sacraments) were still applied. In reality, the call to clarify enrolment policy encapsulated this confusion.

Both groups appeared intent on building community and it was in this area that tension and confusion was very apparent. Far fewer families now regularly attend Sunday parish liturgies and parishes appeared keen to attract them back. In contrast, schools appeared to enjoy what perhaps could be called "a natural community" in that families were generally concerned with and involved in the children's education and were therefore more involved in the school. Schools were intent on developing this sense of involvement and had developed strategies to ensure parents felt welcome and involved. "Developing Christian community" was high on the list of priorities for schools, and this involved ensuring parents and children felt welcome, that opportunities for prayer and celebration were provided and that the needs of all in that community were addressed. Hence many schools provided meals, counselling, financial support, social interaction and so on. This involvement tapered off as children progressed through the school so that in secondary schools this sense of community gradually fades. While school communities recognised that fewer and fewer students were 'practising their faith' or joining the local parish, in most areas there were



no strategies in place to promote linkages or involvement with local faith communities. With only a few exceptions, pastors were conspicuous by their absence in secondary schools and discussions suggested there appeared to be a vain hope that the young people would one day return to the church, perhaps at the time of marriage or the baptism of a child.

Pastors lamented the fact that fewer families were involved in parish and that young people were more noticeable by their absence. There appeared to be a resigned acceptance of this situation and little or no questioning as to why it might be occurring. There appeared to be much enthusiasm for the promotion of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults which indicated that new members were being attracted to the Church. In addition to RCIA, much of the parish's activities seemed concentrated on providing Sunday Eucharist or sacramental celebrations and there appeared to be little energy spent on reflecting on what community may mean today and how it might be made effective. One pastor's comment that the Catholic school is "no longer the village school" is also relevant to parish. The current idea of parish appears to be reflecting a concept of family that is moribund and a concept of community that is no longer appropriate. While a few pastors seemed intent on ensuring the survival of the old style parish, the Catholic ghetto as it were, which provided for the religious, social, sporting and social welfare needs of the Catholic people, most recognised that times had changed. In contrast to medieval times, families now belong to a variety of communities and are much more mobile. While many may argue that the basic needs of those families are the same, parishes appear unable to adjust to the changing lifestyles and priorities of the 1990s parishioner. But both parish and school leadership appeared at a loss as to how to develop community after the years of schooling and appeared to believe that the future entailed only one model of community or more of the same. There was a definite reluctance to address this critical issue.

The fact that Catholic schools are now the only experience of church for so many students was clearly recognised. The additional responsibility this places on school leadership and on the faith witness of teachers was also recognised by all involved in the research as a critical issue

# CHAPTER FIVE

## REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

### 5.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions of some of the main stakeholders in Catholic education today in the Diocese of Townsville in the light of the original vision espoused by the Bishops who established the Catholic school system in Australia.

The Australian Catholic Bishop's decision in 1860s to establish an alternative education system was both courageous and far reaching. The Bishops envisaged the system of education where "Christianity would permeate all education, where every kind of instruction was to be interpenetrated by Catholic doctrine, by Catholic feeling and practice" (Fogarty: 1957; p188). These Bishops were deeply concerned about the Government's move to establish an educational system which was free, compulsory and secular. For these church leaders, such an education was fundamentally flawed in that it ignored the spiritual or religious dimension, an essential ingredient in "true" education which was "intimately and necessarily connected with the pursuit of the last end...." (*Divini Illius Magistri*, 1929, para. 7).

Catholic Education became a fundamental influence on the nature and character of the Australian Church. In many ways the Catholic school became the core of parish life (Dwyer, 1993, p.5) and even the main symbol of Catholic culture (Campaign, 1987, p.56). It was a very tight knit structure, characterised by a very close relationship between parish priest, school and family.

By any measure it was a great success. Substantial school buildings stood on almost every hill in every town or city. They housed overcrowded classes, the one, true faith was taught and the Irish Catholic 'tribal' customs and practices were handed on to the next generation. Sunday Mass attendance was strong, vocations to the priesthood and religious life ensured that the Irish Catholic way of life would continue and the rather embattled ethnic minority these early Bishops ruled had begun to take their rightful place in society.

But the 1950s and 1960s wrought many changes. Society changed in so many ways. Post War immigration introduced new cultures and new values and the Irishness of the Australian Catholic was greatly diminished. The Second Vatican Council introduced a new vision of Church, a vision much more concerned with the transformation of this world and "the joy and hope, grief and anguish of men (sic) of our time" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1966 para.1) rather than the quest for Eternal Life. The role of the family changed dramatically as has our understanding of community. In fact, the world as it approaches the third millenium is characterised by rapid change in almost every facet of life.

Changes in the Diocese of Townsville are not unique but are perhaps developing at a much faster rate than other dioceses throughout Australia. The model of Catholic Education envisaged by the Bishops in the 1860s with its close links between family, school and parish is rapidly breaking down. Clerical leadership in parishes is diminishing quite rapidly. Many of the parishes have no priest in residence. The traditional model of parish with its close links between parish, school and family is also evolving into new forms and new models of parish leadership have been developed in fifty per cent of parishes in this Diocese. Traditional allegiances to parish are radically changing. For example, the number of families with children at Catholic schools who attend Sunday Eucharist where it may be available is rapidly diminishing. Fewer people seem to regard the parish as the cultural centre or the centre for welfare services and social activities it once was. Family structures are changing and those seeking an education in Catholic schools are of a much more varied cultural and socioeconomic mix than was the case in the 1860s.

This study aimed to explore some of the perceptions of the main stake holders in Catholic Education today in the Diocese of Townsville. The study seeks to gather data from those in leadership positions in Catholic Schools and in parishes in order to explore their perceptions of the nature and purpose in Catholic Schools today in the Diocese of Townsville.

## **5.2 The design of the study.**

As the study is concerned with the perceptions of parish leadership and school leadership in a particular diocese a case study method was chosen. The study sought to gain initial baseline information about the purpose of a particular organization, the Catholic school, from the perspective of those who lead Catholic schools and from the perspective of those who lead parishes in the diocese of Townsville. The case study method involves the collection of data to produce some understanding of the entity or organization being studied. It is the "preferred strategy when, how, why and what questions are being asked or when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context" (Burns, 1994, p.313).

### **5.2.1 Research Design**

Three methods of gathering the information were used. Firstly, with the assistance of Doctors, Denis McLaughlin and Gayle Spry from the Australian Catholic University a questionnaire was developed which was forwarded to the administration teams of all primary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Townsville. The questionnaire was entitled *An Initial Exploration of Current Perceptions of Some of the Roles of Catholic School by Catholic School Administration*. Prior to it being forwarded to the administration teams of the Catholic schools it was trialled by over sixty teachers and administrators from every diocese in Queensland and refinements to the questionnaire

were made. 81% of primary schools returned the questionnaire and 90% of secondary schools. The questionnaire sought information in three critical areas:

1. The perceived purposes of the Catholic school in this Diocese today
2. The changing role of the Catholic school and the services it provides.
3. The changing evangelizing roles of both parish and school

Secondly, interviews were conducted with parish pastoral leaders throughout the diocese. The interviews were not recorded electronically but notes were made and read back to the participants to ensure that the interviewer had gathered the information correctly.

Interviews were asked to comment on three areas, summarised by the following questions:

1. From your perspective do you consider that the Catholic school has an important of the mission of your parish today.
2. From your perspective what would you like to affirm about Catholic schools today.
3. From your perspective are there areas of concern or issues that you feel need to be addressed.

### **5.3 The research questions answered**

The response of one pastor that “the parish without the Catholic school is the poorer for it” is indicative of virtually all parish and school responses. Clearly the Catholic school is still seen as an important part of the mission of the local church. The schools’ efforts to be “welcoming and accepting communities” where both students and families experienced “a positive and caring atmosphere” were also recognised by pastoral leaders. School leadership teams returned often to the theme of establishing learning communities where Gospel values could be experienced first hand. Whereas, however, it was once regarded as the core or chief mission of the parish, the Catholic school is now seen as one of the missions of the local church community, sometimes competing for scarce and diminishing resources.

It was clear from the data received from the questionnaires, the interviews and the conference that there is a recognition that radical changes have occurred in parish, school, family and society over the last 30 - 40 years. In this diocese as in the wider community, the nature and purpose of many of our institutions are under review or have been fundamentally altered. The Second Vatican Council reintroduced the biblical understanding of the church as the Pilgrim People of God and a new understanding and appreciation of the Baptismal call to ministry in the church has also emerged. Within the Diocese of Townsville the traditional notion of parish with the parish priest as leader is rapidly disappearing and new forms of leadership are emerging. The traditional allegiances to parish have also rapidly decreased and those who are seeking a Catholic education today appear to

do so from quite different motives and a very different life experience than those who sought that form education a hundred years or even fifty years ago.

### 5.3.1 Lack of Clarity

It was also clearly evident from the research in this Diocese, however, that little discussion had taken place about the nature and purpose of Catholic schools today. Many of those who participated in the conference indicated that this was the first occasion when they had discussed their roles, their understanding of church, of leadership or their understanding about the nature and purpose of Catholic education today. Parish and school leadership seem to have gone their way, as it were and contact between the two groups appears to be rather superficial. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most discussions seem to centre on organizational or financial arrangements with the occasional discussion about some liturgical function.

This paucity of dialogue was a significant feature in the lack of clarity of the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling which was clearly evident in the responses from both schools and parish leadership. Both leadership groups readily acknowledge that both parish and school find themselves in very different circumstances and times and that both are involved in exploring what it means to be Catholic today. The clergy in particular are concerned with, and some would even suggest, perhaps preoccupied with their role in the local church and indeed their future ministry. As far as parishes were concerned the rapidly decreasing number of those who regularly attend parish worship or are involved in parish organizations is a matter of critical concern. Few strategies to address this situation were proposed and there seemed to be a reluctant acceptance of the situation. In some parishes a renewed enthusiasm for RCIA appeared to be the central focus of much of the parish's activities. In contrast, however, the numbers seeking Catholic education are increasing quite dramatically. Over the past five years enrolments in both primary and secondary schools have increased by over 5% per year. In that time two new primary schools have been opened, another is due to be opened in 1998 and a new secondary school is planned. Quite clearly, Catholic schools are seen by many as fulfilling a need.

### 5.3.2 A new vision for Catholic Schools

The church itself is espousing a new vision for Catholic schools and recent Roman and local church documents have outlined different expectations for Catholic schools. Officially, as it were, Catholic schools are no longer seen as primarily preparing students for eternal life, but as agents of transformation, not only for the students and the local communities themselves but agents of transformation for the world in which we live.

This is simply another way of saying that the school is an institution where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be (*The Catholic School*, para. 31)

Little or no exploration of this transformational role has been undertaken by parishes, parish leadership or school leadership. The capacity of a Catholic school to examine its own structures and methodology in the light of the Gospel should not only make it a radically different institution but also offers the opportunity to hone and legitimise its power to criticise those external to it (Leavey, 1984, p.26). Yet, underneath all the rhetoric of exploring what it means to be Catholic today and the place of the Catholic school in bringing about the Kingdom, the old hallmarks or criteria for success are still applied to Catholic schools. Sacramental involvement still seems to be a fundamental criteria for judging the success of the Catholic school. Many parish leaders lament the fact that students are quite conspicuous by their absence at Sunday liturgies and because of that, there appeared to be an underlying assumption that Catholic schools were not really “doing the job properly”. Less than 20% it was estimated, were involved in parish in any way whatsoever. Fewer people were presenting themselves for sacramental involvement. If pastors and administration teams are no longer clear on what it means to be Catholic today, however, then how can we judge whether our schools are Catholic and what criteria or measure of success do we apply to our schools and to our graduates? Any evaluation of the Catholic school should not be limited to faith practice alone, particularly given the differing reasons why parents chose a Catholic education for their children. The research indicates that Catholic schools are very actively involved in establishing vibrant faith communities where students, staff and to a lesser extent, parents can “experience kingdom or gospel values”.

Schools provide creative opportunities to celebrate and to worship. But these very activities call for a need for Catholic schools to actively explore why and for whom they exist and what connection they have to the ongoing faith formation and development of those in their care.

### 5.3.3 Schools as faith communities

Establishing themselves as “faith communities built on gospel values” was high on the list of priorities for Townsville Catholic schools. As one school indicated “the mission of the school is to act as a gathering place to work together, to celebrate together and reflect on our Christian mission.” Both school and parish leadership recognised that there is now much greater emphasis on the evangelisation of both students and parents, particularly through the experiencing of this faith community in action. This daily experiencing of evangelising seems in accord with Pope Paul VI’s vision who sees the Church evangelising when “she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs” (Evangeliū Nuntiandi, 1975, paragraph 18).

Both groups would acknowledge that Catholic schools are now providing the only experience of church and for many of the students and for many of their parents as well. The problems which emerge from these increasing numbers seeking Catholic education is not as in the past a matter of simply coping and providing additional physical resources, but those who are seeking Catholic schools are by and large, "not churched", do not belong to the Catholic culture as it were, have little knowledge of the faith and in the main, not practicing.

#### **5.3.4 Clarity on Enrolment Policies**

The rather persistent call from virtually all those involved in the research for some form of clarity in school enrolment policies encapsulated this dilemma facing schools and parishes. Schools are much more concerned with evangelizing, according to the perceptions of both parish pastoral leaders and schools, but who they are called on to evangelize is far from clear. Should they be open only to those who can prove or demonstrate some connection with the church or do they have a wider role to the community? Should they serve only those, in the words of one pastor, "who come with a Baptism certificate in one hand and a pledge in the other?" What is the place of ecumenism in our schools and how many children of other Christian and non Christian faiths can we accept? How many non-Catholics or non-Christians can we accept before we question whether or not our schools are truly Catholic? Who are our Catholic schools for and what does it mean to be Catholic today were both underlying principles in the call for clarity in enrolment policies.

In addition, parental expectations of Catholic schools are very varied and, according to the perceptions of both school and parish leaders, quite different from the expectations of parents in the 50s or 40s or 30s. Why parents choose the Catholic school for their children when they appear to have limited commitment to religious goals is a matter which needs further research. Discipline, pastoral care, examination results, status of the 'private' school, job opportunities appear to be high on the list of priorities as far as parents are concerned. Outlining the nature and purpose of Catholic schools to the local community and in particular, at the enrolment interview is clearly a priority. But that implies that parish and school have a common vision and a common understanding of the mission of the Catholic school in the local church. Parish and school leaders, however, were intent on developing ongoing mechanisms "to develop a sense of joint ministry, a sense of unity in the local church".

#### **5.3.5 Linkage with Parish**

Both parish and school were acutely aware, however, that the old concept of the Catholic school as the village school, as it were is long past. For the majority of those attending Catholic schools, the parish is no longer the centre of their faith development. Involvement in parish is rapidly diminishing. While some parishes have attempted to address this situation, most notably through

such programs as the RCIA and assuming responsibility for the sacramental preparation of children, many parishes appear to have reluctantly accepted this situation as virtually inevitable and gone on with life.

By and large, with one or two notable exceptions, parishes have done little or nothing to attract this personnel and appeared to be operating much the same way as they have been over the last 120 years. Neither group appeared to have discussed any form of ongoing cooperation or ongoing initiatives to provide faith development, involvement or opportunities for those involved in the school community. This was particularly evident in the secondary schools where there appeared to be very little connection with secondary schools and local parish communities with only a few exceptions. Pastors were conspicuous by their absence in secondary schools and discussions suggested there appeared to be a rather optimistic hope that young people would one day return to the church, perhaps at the time of marriage or the baptism of a child. There also seemed to be a general acceptance that young people were temporarily lost to the church. This acceptance, however reluctant that may be, is a critical problem. Secondary schools in particular suggest that families and parishes have effectively abandoned their responsibilities for the faith development of their young people. In most parishes and in most schools, apart from some sacramental programs, adult education initiatives were very limited. Programs in parishes to involve school age children and school leavers were virtually non-existent. But the resultant overcompensation by schools has resulted in what amounts to a new ecclesiology. The school has in reality become the normative faith community. The role of the parish was effectively be diminished because there is 'nothing for young people'. But this situation presents a challenge to the entire local church. Is the local Catholic school part of the Catholic community or has the parish become the community of the Catholic school?

#### **5.3.6 Building Community**

Both parish and school were very much concerned with building community. Both parish and school were beginning to or had developed structures to ensure that people felt welcome and were provided with opportunities to become involved. Both groups were intent on providing services which met the needs of their local community such as counseling or providing food and clothing for the poor or simply providing for social activities to ensure that the local communities were both vibrant and viable. In reality, however, a number of parishes were struggling.

Schools were rejoicing in success because, according to the perceptions of a number of administration teams, they enjoyed what could best be described as a 'natural community' in that families were generally concerned with and involved in their children's education and therefore they were naturally more involved in the school. Because these parents knew the teachers and the structures, they often called on the schools and school personnel for additional support such as



counselling or advice in a range of matters from financial management to the upbringing of children. There seem to be a sense of unfamiliarity with parish personnel and therefore a reluctance to become involved in structures or in programs run by the parish.

While schools rejoiced in this form of community, this involvement began to diminish as the children progressed throughout the school. In the early years this involvement in the community was very strong. Parents attended school often they took part in liturgies regularly with their children and called on the services of the school at regular intervals. But all this involvement gradually diminished as the child moved up through the years of school, so that by the end of year 12 there was minimal involvement in the school community by parents and students. Neither group, parish or school seemed to address this problem of transient involvement and while schools called themselves faith communities and provided many laudable, liturgical, and social activities to involve parents and students, there was little or no linkage with local faith communities. A number of school administration teams suggested that the rather rigid, formalised nature of Sunday worship in parish, the inflexibility of times for worship which do not appear to recognise changed lifestyle and work habits and the fact that many families are no longer familiar with parish personnel are significant factors in the decline of attendance at Sunday eucharistic celebrations. As one school leadership team wrote, "they need to feel they belong, and that's how they feel in the school community so they come along to liturgies at school, particularly where their children have a role to play".

### 5.3.7 Unrealistic Expectations

School administration teams have become acutely aware in many cases of the demands and expectations of the local church, and stresses, strains and tensions have emerged particularly with the demise of the religious sisters and brothers through the Catholic school system. In many cases the expectations on the teachers to be 'substitute religious' and the expectations as far as attendance of parish liturgies, knowledge of the faith, commitment to the school can be somewhat oppressive, even intrusive. Some pastors indicated that they regarded the teachers in the school as parish ministers. A range of expectations and commitments followed. It could well be argued that the original Bishops' understanding of the role of the Catholic teacher was indeed visionary and showed a clear understanding of the impact and importance of the faith life of the teacher.

That belief in the importance of the faith witness and commitment of the teacher was one important reason why those early colonial Bishops recruited so many religious brothers and nuns to serve in Catholic schools. But what can we legitimately expect of our teachers in the 1990s. They are not religious sisters or nuns, nor do they commit themselves to the teaching profession in the same way that religious brothers and sisters did. Their lifestyle is different. They belong to a church which is struggling to understand its role and its mission in the world today. Yet their faith witness is no

less important than it was in the 1860s or the 1960s. So what can be legitimately and rightly expected of the teachers in Catholic schools?

The teacher's critical role has been explored in Church documents and various books of late yet much needs to be done to develop more realistic expectations of teachers and indeed a better understanding and appreciation of the ministry of teaching in a Catholic school today rather than viewing teachers as substitute religious.

In virtually a unanimous view, parish pastoral leaders indicated that they saw the administration teams of the schools and in particular the principal as key people in the parish and as key leaders in the church today. While one or two parish leaders saw the future as quite "scarey" when schools and even parishes were handed over to the care of these new leaders, there was a strong view that these key people needed specialised training. The question of what we can legitimately expect of them and what must be done in return to train them adequately for their role as faith and educational leaders was constantly raised in almost every interview. Some pastoral leaders recognised that in years past religious houses and religious orders were concerned with the spirituality and the faith development of the members of their congregation. Yet similar expectations are applied to today's school leaders, without that sort training and without much opportunity for that sort of spirituality to be developed. Religious orders and institutes also provided communal training and support and there are few such opportunities for today's school leader.

#### **5.4 Conclusions of the Study**

The Catholic school in the Diocese of Townsville is still regarded as an important mission of the local church. Catholic schools in the Diocese provide the only experience of church for most of their students and indeed for many, if not most of their families. Both parish and administration teams consider the experience of church offered to the students in local Catholic schools to be welcoming and positive. But it is a transient experience for there is little attempt to link the school faith community with parish or any other faith community. Both parish and schools appear to be operating quite independently with each intent on establishing their own community.

It is clear that allegiance to parish has changed. Local estimates indicate that less than 20% regularly attend Sunday Eucharist and both parish leadership and school leadership recognise that many families avail themselves of the many services now offered through the schools. While the smaller, more isolated country parishes still appear to have some sense of community, and the concept of "the village school" may have some relevance, larger towns or city parishes appear to define community quite differently. The concept of parish was devised in the middle ages where small village communities were homogeneous, where there was little travel and where a local

community was a vibrant and effective part of people's lives. Such is not the case today. People belong to a variety of communities. They are much more mobile. They have more complex needs and those needs are met in a variety of different ways. Secondly families are under significant stress and changes have occurred in families in the last few years. In fact it is now somewhat difficult to define by what we mean by family and yet the local church and the school appears to be operating on a traditional and rather out moded definition of both family and parish. Yet families are still looking for 'a trust relationship' or a place to belong and the Catholic school appears to be fulfilling that need, at least in the early years of school involvement.

Further research needs to be undertaken to determine the nature and purpose of Catholic schools today in these changing circumstances. Parents choose Catholic schools for a variety of reasons and Catholic schools themselves are struggling to understand their role in the Church today and, along with other church agencies, with what it means to be Catholic in the post Vatican II era. The consistent call by parish and school leaders for the development of an enrolment policy encapsulates almost every issue raised in this research. Who Catholic schools should serve today and what is expected of them is shaping up to be a critical issue.

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## **APPENDIX ONE**

To undertake the research copy of the letter of Permission, from the Director of the Townsville Catholic Education Office.



# Catholic Education Office

D I O C E S E O F T O W N S V I L L E

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In reply please quote

**COPY FOR YOUR  
INFORMATION**

19 March 1996.

The Chair,  
Research Projects Ethics Committee,  
Australian Catholic University (Queensland),  
PO Box 247,  
EVERTON PARK, 4053.

Dear Chair,

Re: Mr Jim Quillinan - MEd Catholic Schooling  
*Research Project*

I wish to advise you that I am aware of a research project which Mr Quillinan is about to undertake which will focus on Catholic schools and their relationship to Parishes in the Townsville Diocese.

I support this project and believe it will be constructive in developing an enhanced environment for the growth of Catholic Education. The research findings, where appropriate, will be treated confidentially.

Yours sincerely,

*Mike Byrne*  
DIRECTOR.

Copy of original signed document  
already forwarded to you.

---

*Service and Education in Faith*

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Postal Address: P.O. Box 861, Aikenvale, Qld 4811  
Phone (077) 75 2877 Fax (077) 75 5433 Finance Fax (077) 25 6989



## **APPENDIX TWO**

Copy of the letter sent to Administration Teams of all Catholic secondary and primary schools in the Diocese of Townsville.



# Catholic Education Office

D I O C E S E O F T O W N S V I L L E

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In reply please quote

19 October, 1995

Dear Principal

Re: Perceptions of Catholic Schooling

In preparation for our Catholic Education Conference in 1996 may I ask you to complete the attached questionnaire?

Many of us now believe that the Catholic School is the main experience of church for many, if not most of our students. But what does that mean?

Research into other areas of Catholic Schooling indicate some tentative conclusions

- 1) Regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist has fallen;
- 2) Many parents see the school as providing services which were seen perhaps as the domain of the parish;
- 3) Schools are responding to the needs of students and families in new ways
- 4) Many parents and students may see the school community as more responsive to their needs than the parish community;

I am asking your Administration Team to explore these questions together. The questions accompanying this letter are seeking your opinion only - but your opinion is important. What is the reality for your school - is your school the main experience of church? and if so what are the practical experiences of that?

For example, during research conducted by an ACU academic, one principal outlined her experience of assisting a family under stress - a family member had died quite suddenly and the school organised the funeral liturgy, visited the family, and provided ongoing back up support for that family for quite some time. Sound familiar to you?

The information gained from this questionnaire will be collated and used in preparation for our day together on February 29th. Bishop Putney has suggested that he would use this material, and the information gathered from my interviews with Parish Priests/Parish Leaders for his keynote address.

I will also prepare a brief summary for Bishop Putney and for release at our conference. Again, this will be in general terms and no school response will be identified. Should you NOT wish to take part don't complete the questionnaire.

I am also undertaking research as part of my M.Ed. (Catholic Schooling) at the Australian Catholic University. I have worked with Drs Denis McLaughlin and Gayle Spry in developing this questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire as far as my study is concerned is to gather initial information about the purposes of the Catholic School from this perspective of the Admin Team. It should only take around 15 minutes to complete and; apart from the brief conference summary mentioned above, the results will be treated confidentially. Your school will not be identified and results will be destroyed at the end of the study.

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*Service and Education in Faith*

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Postal Address: P.O. Box 861, Aitkenvale, Qld. 4814  
Phone: (077) 75 2877 Fax: (077) 75 5133 Finance Fax: (077) 25 6989

I suggest that a number of key issues could emerge from this questionnaire. I am not pre-empting your response but I draw your attention to the nine possible issues identified in Mike's letter to you. They are issues which many of you have raised with me.

- 1) Why do parents choose to send their children to a Catholic school?
- 2) Is the Catholic school still seen as "the best means of handing on the faith"?
- 3) What is the place of Eucharist in schools?
- 4) What is the school's role as far as evangelisation is concerned?
- 5) What should our enrolment policy be?
- 6) What is the connection between the school and the parish and the new parish/ministerial region structures?
- 7) What place does ecumenism have in our schools?
- 8) What "kind" of church are we preparing our students to be part of?
- 9) What is our understanding of ministry and what understanding of it are we conveying to our students?

During our day together on 29th February I suggest that the program would include:

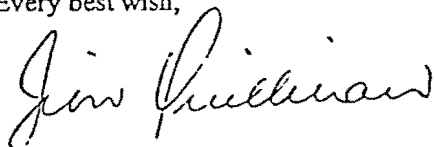
- i) a Keynote Address which highlights the issues that emerge from our questionnaires;
- ii) an opportunity to discuss together these issues;
- iii) an opportunity to begin developing some guiding principles or some documents which will help inform our practice in these key areas

Please do not feel restricted to the few lines under each question - you may wish to write a lot more. Your discussion of these questions is an important preparation for our conference.

Thank you - I do appreciate your contribution. Please note the return date of 17th November. If you have any queries your school's consultant is available to help or ring me at the office.

I am including a number of copies of the questionnaire but only one response per school is needed. The others are for your own notes or in case you make a mistake!

Every best wish,



Jim Quillinan  
Diocesan Religious Education Coordinator

## APPENDIX THREE

Copy of the Questionnaire entitled

*An initial exploration of current perceptions  
of some of the roles of the Catholic school  
by Catholic school administration.*

# Catholic Education Office

DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE

## AN INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THE CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOME OF THE PURPOSES OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL BY CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TEAMS

### Rationale

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather initial information about the purposes of the Catholic school from the perspective of the administration team.

It is acknowledged that the questions seek opinions only. Your perception with all its incisive accuracy or its vagueness is all that is asked. This is particularly relevant for questions 4 & 5.

The interim report emanating from these tentative data will provide some basic information to assist a better understanding of some of the issues currently influencing Catholic schools. This interim report should assist our discussions at next year's conference.

Please complete this questionnaire at an Administration Team meeting. One response per school is needed.

The information received will be treated confidentially and individual schools will not be identified.

Is your school: P-7?  8-10?  8-12?  P-12?   
Boys?  Girls?  Co-Ed?

No. of Families  No. of Students  No. of full time Teachers

PLEASE RETURN TO:  
BY FRIDAY 17TH NOVEMBER

Jim Gullinan  
Catholic Education Office  
PO Box 861  
ATKENVALE. 4814

# Catholic Education Office

DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE

## AN INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THE CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOME OF THE PURPOSES OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL BY CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TEAMS

### Rationale

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather initial information about the purposes of the Catholic school from the perspective of the administration team.

It is acknowledged that the questions seek opinions only. Your perception with all its incisive accuracy or its vagueness is all that is asked. This is particularly relevant for questions 4 & 5.

The interim report emanating from these tentative data will provide some basic information to assist a better understanding of some of the issues currently influencing Catholic schools. This interim report should assist our discussions at next year's conference.

Please complete this questionnaire at an Administration Team meeting. One response per school is needed.

The information received will be treated confidentially and individual schools will not be identified.

Is your school: P-7?  8-10?  8-12?  P-12?   
Boys?  Girls?  Co-Ed?

No. of Families  No. of Students  No. of full time Teachers

PLEASE RETURN TO:  
BY FRIDAY 17TH NOVEMBER

Jim Quillman  
Catholic Education Office  
PO Box 861  
ATKENVILLE 4814

1. What does the Admin Team think is the specific mission of your school in this local area?  
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.....  
.....
2. What important differences do you perceive between your school and government and other non government schools in your area?.....  
.....  
.....
3. What are the most important reasons parents give for sending their children to your school? .....  
.....  
.....

Questions 4 and 5 ask you to make estimations only. The difficulty involved is readily acknowledged.

4. Estimate what percentage of your parents would attend Saturday night/Sunday worship weekly if such is available.
5. If the opportunity is available estimate the percentage of your parents who would regularly attend school/class organised worship or liturgy.
6. If there is a discrepancy between the results for questions 4 & 5 please comment:  
.....  
.....  
.....

The staff in Catholic schools (including yourselves) are often called upon to provide pastoral care in addition to teaching and administration. Questions 7 to 10 seek to explore this aspect of school life.

7. What areas of advice/care do you provide to STUDENTS other than curriculum, career and classroom behaviour? .....  
.....  
.....  
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8. Do you perceive **STUDENTS** using school personnel for this purpose as well as other church people? Please elaborate .....

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9. What areas of advice / care do you provide to **PARENTS**?

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10. Do you perceive **PARENTS** using the school personnel for this purpose as well as other church people? Please elaborate .....

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The evangelising roles of parish and school are changing. Questions 11-16 explore this issue.

11. Does your school provide assistance to needy students with such items as uniform, text books, breakfast? Others - please describe: .....

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12. Is your school used for local community activities (eg. social, sport, culture, adult education, etc.)? Please elaborate .....

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13. What other experiences of church do you think the majority of your **STUDENTS** have?

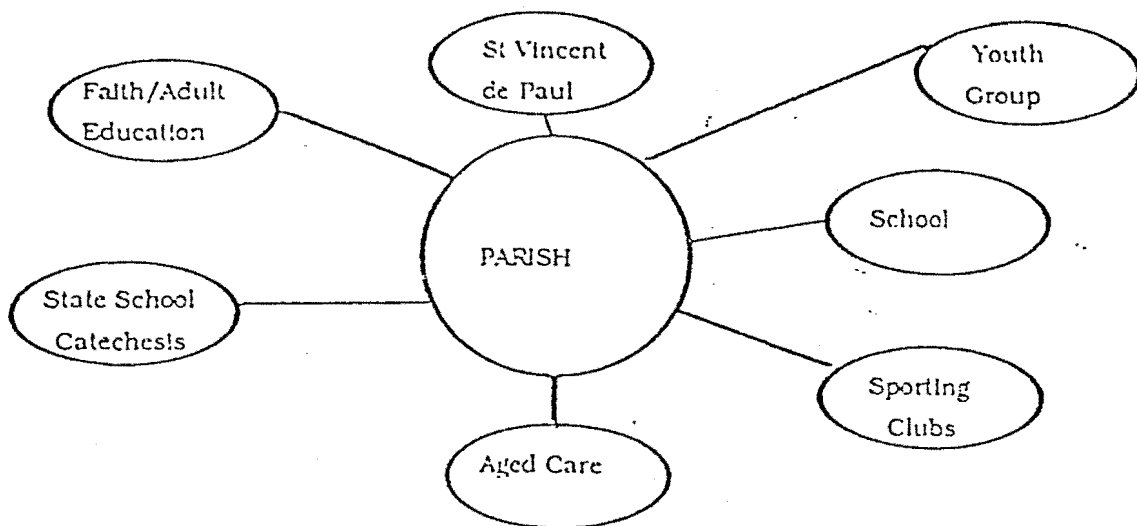
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14. In your opinion is the school the main experience of church for the majority of your PARENTS? Please explain: .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
15. Does your school provide faith education programs for PARENTS? Please elaborate: .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
16. A model of school/parish relationship is the diagram below.



Please draw a diagram to illustrate the school/parish and local community relationship for your school

## **APPENDIX FOUR**

Copy of letter forwarded to all Pastoral Leaders in the  
Diocese of Townsville.



# Catholic Education Office

D I O C E S E O F T O W N S V I L L E

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In reply please quote

October 15, 1996

Dear Colleague

As you would be aware our Catholic Education Conference in 1996 will focus on the Catholic School in the Parish.

In preparation for that Conference I am seeking a half an hour of your time to explore three questions

- 1) Do you see the Catholic School as still being an important part of the mission of your parish
- 2) What would you like to affirm about Catholic Schools Today
- 3) What areas of concern/issues would you like addressed at the Conference

I am also undertaking research at the Australian Catholic University for my M.Ed (Catholic Schooling). I would like to use the material from our discussion as part of that research. It will be anonymous and you will not be quoted directly. Any research notes taken at the interview will be destroyed at the end of my research.

I would like to prepare a one page summary of my interviews with pastoral leaders for Bishop Putney and for publication at the Conference. Again that material will be expressed in general terms and will not be attributed to any individual.

I will ring for an appointment shortly. If you have any questions please ask them and if you do not wish to take part in my research please feel free to say so.

Every best wish.

Jim Quillinan  
Diocesan Religious Education Coordinator

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*Service and Education in Faith*

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## **APPENDIX FIVE**

Copy of the brief summary of the initial baseline data from the questionnaires sent to schools and from the interviews with parish Pastoral Leaders, presented to all participants of the Conference on the Catholic School in the parish.

## Research: Schools - Perceptions

**Catholic Schools: Enabling people to meet Jesus  
and to experience Kingdom Values**

### Specific Mission

To provide an alternative

- a lived faith environment (70%)
- a holistic education
- evangelisation & faith education
- quality education

### Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools

Caring environment

- a community atmosphere 80%

Positive Values 70%

Quality education - good academic results 60%

Christian dimension / Teaching RE 35%

Cheap Private School

Discipline

### Worshipping Regularly

Primary 8% - 35%

at school 4% - 60%

Secondary 10% - 20%

at school 1% - 50%

### Counselling/advice

- family
- financial
- conflict
- grief
- disputes
- personal development
- behaviour management
- marriage

plus plus

### Assistance to Needy

- fee reduction / exemption
- uniforms
- books
- lunch
- meals (esp. breakfast)
- transport costs
- medical expenses

**“For most students school provides their only  
experience of church” - but what do we mean by  
Church?**

## Research: Parish Perspective

**Identity Crisis: What does it mean to be Catholic today -**

- our institutions / practices
- personally
- in the Kingdom

1. School is one of the important ministries of the local Church
2. Focus now on evangelising rather than catechising
3. No longer "village school"
  - enrolment policy      ecumenism  
implications for celebrations / eucharist  
why parents choose
  - linkage with parish      sacramental policy  
pastor's involvement  
teachers as parish ministers
4. Core Leadership & faith commitment

**Catholic Schools - warm, welcoming, generous & committed**

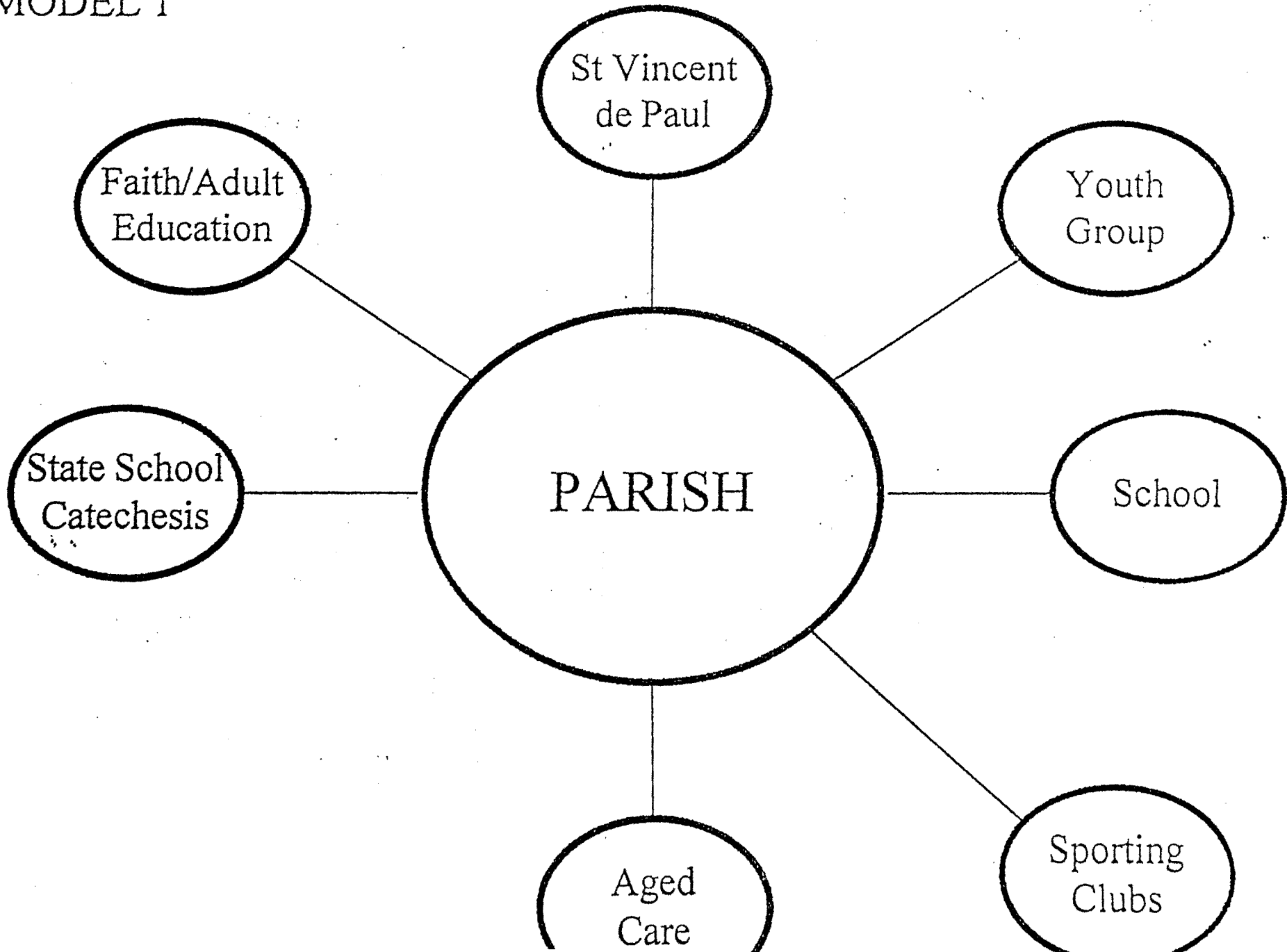
**But**

**Need to continually ask Where is God & The Good News here?**

## **APPENDIX SIX**

### Model 1

MODEL 1

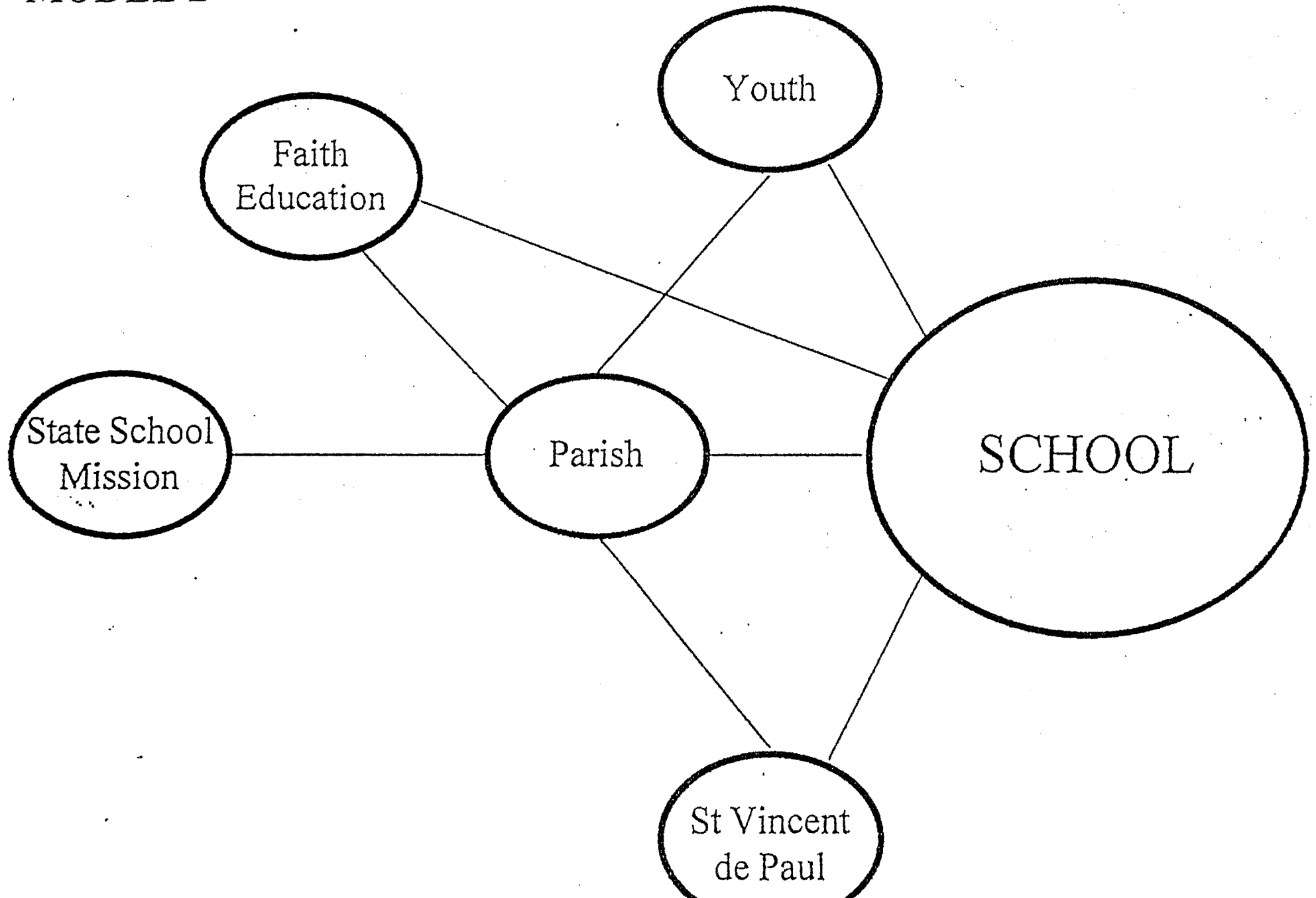




## **APPENDIX SEVEN**

### **Model 2**

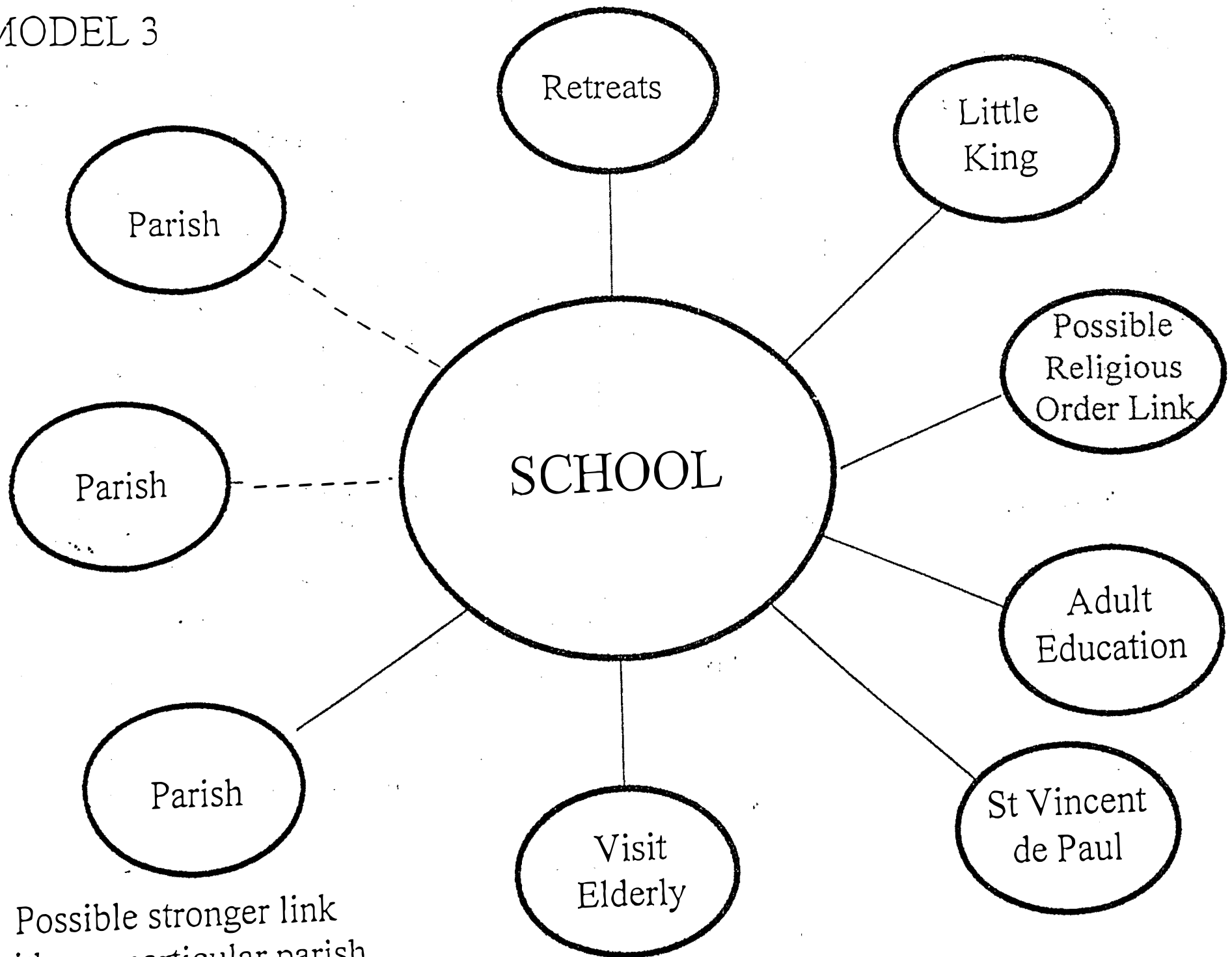
# MODEL 2



## **APPENDIX EIGHT**

Model 3

MODEL 3



Possible stronger link  
with one particular parish