



# Appreciative Visitation with Catholic Schools 2017–2018

## Promising Examples of Parish-School Relationships

Office for Renewing Parishes | Jill Gallio and Tim Grauel | **v10 October 2018**

Many healthy, vibrant, and renewing parish-school relationships were noted during the 2017 – 2018 visits to Catholic Schools conducted by the Office for Renewing Parishes. An appreciative listening approach, through the lens of the **Eight Gospel Characteristics**, guided interactions with school boards, parents and friends, and staff meetings. This paper highlights practical and creative ways in which schools and parishes build, sustain and repair local relationships. It is meant to support and give colour to the working draft, *Being Church Together: A Theology, Vision and Guiding Principles for the Parish-School relationship* (CESA, October 2018).

### 1. Intentional collaboration between Parish and School leadership

*The parish is a community of diverse gifts and charisms, each recognised and nurtured in the community, and coordinated by the parish priest and leadership team.*

*Gospel Characteristic #7*

Mutual support and engagement across School and Parish life is regularly expressed, and is actively led, by School and Parish leadership teams.

- Parish Priest and/or parish representatives regularly attend School Board meetings, and Principals and/or APRIMS regularly attend Parish Pastoral Council meetings
- Where parish leadership team meetings occur, Principals and/or APRIMS regularly attend
- Priests, Pastoral Associates, Principals, Deputy Principals, APRIMS and other key leaders come together each term as a combined Parish/School leadership team for planning and relationship building
- Parish Priests and parish representatives, Principals and school representatives collaborate on working parties at particular times of change within parishes and schools (i.e. when new Parish Priests or Principals are appointed or when large building projects are undertaken)
- Annual induction offered for new and existing School Board and Parish Pastoral Council members
- Combined School Board and Parish Pastoral Council meetings are held annually, not only to share in formation and planning but to build relationships

*'Staff formation, together with regular formation of school and parish leadership teams, is vital in the ongoing faith development of students and provides an engaging community of witness and service (Pastoral Worker)*

### 2. Generous opportunities for Masses, liturgies and community prayer

*Eucharistic liturgies are prayerful and fully participative.*

*The Word of God is proclaimed in good preaching and faithful lives.*

*Gospel Characteristics #2 & #3*

School staff, students, parents and families express appreciation for those occasions when Masses, liturgies and community prayer are made available; when students are involved in liturgy preparation and in active participation; and when the Parish Priest can relate to the students in age appropriate ways.

- Whole of school Masses, year-level Masses and liturgies are regularly celebrated
- The Parish Priest's preaching is relevant to students' lives and has a point that students can take away
- Parish or School Feast days are celebrated together across the School and the Parish
- Schools hold weekly staff and community prayer times which are open to both School and Parish communities. This is especially valued by families who don't regularly attend Mass on Sundays
- Children with special needs are acknowledged and their participation in the liturgy is encouraged
- Regional Masses (i.e. Schools of the Fleurieu Peninsula) or schools of the same charism (i.e. Mercy Schools) come together
- Those Parish Priests, whose parishes do not contain Catholic schools, where possible, connect with Catholic schools that may find it difficult to offer Mass regularly (i.e. some Parish Priests have several schools within their parishes)
- Many schools that are not located close to the Parish Church make an effort for children to attend Mass together in the Parish Church, sometimes with other schools within the parish
- Family Masses are important opportunities to build strong School and Parish participation. Parishes who pay attention to welcoming school communities and school families, include family-friendly music. Parishes and schools that work together towards a shared mission accept people 'where they are at'
- Meditation is practised in many schools

*'Our children catch the train down to the Parish. It's important to be in the Parish Church and with parishioners, where children can see Ministers to the Sick being commissioned to take communion to the sick, etc.'* (Principal)

*'One child, who was in a wheelchair, was so proud to carry forward the Book of the Gospels with ribbons flowing'* (School Board parent)

*'Please don't forget about us! Just because we don't attend Mass, it doesn't mean that Church or our faith isn't important to us'* (School Board parent)

*'The students prepare the liturgies from scratch, they pick the readings, they are not spoon fed, they interpret the readings for themselves and they prepare the reflections and prayers'* (APRIM)

*'Liturgies are great! We can't always fit all the community into year-level and whole school Masses'* (Principal)

*'Our parishioners changed the monthly morning tea so that it occurred on the same week as the Family Mass, so our school families could stay'* (APRIM)

*'We have a great Parish Priest; it is a very vibrant parish. There is a mutual respect and a connection to the community. The community is always welcoming and at school Masses the children chat to the parishioners. And parishioners call the children by name.'* (Parishioner who is a member of the School Board)

*'Ours is a small school, every one of our staff members have a close relationship with their own parish and are active in some way, e.g. on their Parish Pastoral Council, help with the Sacrament Program or Children's Liturgy of the Word.'* (Principal)

*"When I meditate, I think about God and the messages in the bible which goes deep into my brain because I'm not distracted by anything else"* (student as told to the APRIM)

### 3. Sacramental programs are opportunities to strengthen the Parish/School partnership

*Eucharistic liturgies are prayerful and fully participative.*

*Gospel Characteristics #2*

Sacramental programs work particularly well when there are strong partnerships between Pastoral Associates/Sacrament Coordinators and APRIMs/RECs.

- Pastoral Associate and APRIM meet regularly to coordinate their activities
- When they have the opportunity, parents value being able to prepare with their children for Confirmation and First Holy Communion
- Whole community acknowledgement of families:
  - Presentation Masses are held to present families
  - Parishioners pray for the children who are celebrating Sacraments
  - Holy Communion is celebrated at the parish Sunday Mass

*'The Sacramental programme is a huge, golden opportunity to re-evangelise families. Therefore, it's critical that parishioners are welcoming and invitational but unfortunately this isn't always the case' (APRIM)*

*'The choirs from both schools sing at the celebrations for confirmation' (Pastoral Associate)*

### 4. Visible presence of the Parish Priest and/or Pastoral Associate within the School community and grounds

*The parish is a community of diverse gifts and charisms, each recognised and nurtured in the community, and coordinated by the parish priest and leadership team.*

*Gospel Characteristic #7*

The Parish Priest and Pastoral Associate (or pastoral worker) so value their relationship with the School that they are not only present for School Masses, but often at other times as well.

- Appropriate, prior notice (possibly via Parish/School leadership team meetings) and discussion around visits is appreciated and advisable due to tight schedules, school curriculums and the business of all involved
- Parish Priests, and sometimes Pastoral Associates, come to School Assemblies and into classes to work with class teachers, APRIMs and RECs as liturgies for class Masses are prepared
- Some Secondary Colleges have resident Chaplains who are Priests and are therefore able to have a presence in the school and support the Sacrament programme
- The Parish Priest or Pastoral Associate occasionally share in yard duty to have the opportunity to get to know some of the school staff, students and parents

Parishioner involvement and connection across parish and school:

- Offering free coffee while greeting parents during morning school drop off in the school/parish carpark provides an opportunity to meet and greet families who may be otherwise disengaged from parish life
- Appropriate checks regarding child protection and volunteer induction must occur in a timely fashion

- Parishioners are invited to School Masses
- Open Days where parishioners come to experience how a modern Catholic School operates
- Invitations to school and parish events (e.g. picnics and twilight Christmas Carol evenings and concerts)
- Parish community connections
- Parishioners volunteering in schools

*'We are most blessed in our school and parish community. There is mutual respect, the parish community is always welcoming, many families have had generational involvement and the wonderful community connection draws you in. The school is an extension of the mission of the Church, we have great relationships across schools and parish and the parish priest is exceptional. There is a broader sense of education, the school serving the community—our community garden is one example'* (Principal)

*'I came from a traditional Catholic background - YCW background. It's been very interesting watching some of the children and grandchildren and the way they approach the Church. They are all good people and community leaders. What do they miss out on by not going to Church? It's not better or worse- just different'* (Grandparent who is a School Board member)

*'The school and parish have an enormous number of volunteers – letting the world know that God still loves them.'* (School Board member)

*'Parishioners run the LAP programme in the school and work with the children'* (Teacher)

*'Our Parish Priest is very pastoral and notices the struggling families. He speaks to them and asks us about them. He makes no judgement, just affirmation. He is focussed on building community and outreach.'* (APRIM)

## 5. Pastoral attentiveness to families who wish to know more about the Catholic faith and practice

*The parish is a community in which each member is called to a personal relationship with Jesus.*

*The Word of God is proclaimed in good preaching and faithful lives.*

*Gospel Characteristics #1 & #3*

Many parents appear to present with a weak Catholic affiliation or non-religious background (i.e. 'church going' is not part of their regular culture). Nevertheless, many deeply appreciate the values and ethos of the school and are keen to know more about what their children are learning in faith education. Many say they love learning from their children.

- Annual induction on Catholic identity available to parents new to the school (i.e. guide to attending Mass or liturgies—Catholic culture and etiquette)
- Small group reflections offered during Lent, Advent and Lectio Divina groups throughout the year
- Playgroups have prayer and other aspects of faith incorporated in their program
- Catholic identity resources are widely available:
  - Programmes such as 'Conversations about Catholics'
  - Books such as 'So you're sending your child to a Catholic School'
  - Small group sessions such as RCIA and 'Alpha in a Catholic Context'

*'When our family travelled through the Coonawarra (to visit wineries) our daughter in Year 3 kept insisting that we stop in Penola to learn more about St Mary of the Cross Mackillop. She eventually wore us down and we stopped at the Interpretive Centre. How amazing that was, a real highlight. If it wasn't for our daughter's keen interest, we never would have learned so much about this remarkable saint'*

*'Our APRIM has tried several ways to encourage families and has engaged new families by offering an induction on the faith which was presented Café style.'* (Principal)

## **6. Cooperation around property, resources and staff**

*The parish is a community of diverse gifts and charisms, each recognised and nurtured in the community, and coordinated by the parish priest and leadership team.*

*Gospel Characteristic #7*

The School and the Parish work together to share facilities (i.e. offices, halls, sheds, car parks and gardens), as well as—where appropriate, work spaces, personnel and activities

- Combined parish and school activities (i.e. shared working bees, photocopiers, ESO support)
- Combined Parish and School research projects (i.e. Leuven Studies on Catholic identity)
- Parish and School combined picnics and twilight Carol evenings
- Sacrament Coordinators are (as appropriate) employed by both the School and the Parish

*'Our school supports the Parish Festas and offers our facilities to accommodate the many people who attend'* (Principal)

*'The School takes a turn on the Parish Church cleaning roster.'*

*'The Family Faith Coordinator oversees the Program, and she is paid equally by each school and the parish'* (Parish Priest)

## **7. More deeply appreciating the School's effectiveness in Mission and Outreach**

*There is a warm sense of community outreach and welcome.*

*The parish community is visibly engaged with those who experience poverty and need, and with those at the margins of society and church.*

*Gospel Characteristics #4 & #5*

The mission field in Catholic schools is responded to in an exemplary manner. Evangelisation is occurring in many ways, and by many people—including by children:

- Schools are Inclusive of all families from many different circumstances in life
- There are opportunities for families and staff to grow in faith
- At times of family difficulty and grief the children are able to share their experiences and pray for the families

*'I am learning more and more about Church every day through my children'* (Parent)

*'My child asked to set up a sacred prayer space in our home.'*

*'I wasn't sure whether my partner and I would be accepted by the school. However, we were bowled over when the Principal reassured us: "you would be a blessing to our school!" (Parent)*

*'After our close neighbour passed away, it was difficult for our daughter to return to school because she were so devastated. However, I was blown away with the teacher's response and care for our daughter' (Parent)*

*'Our youngest is very active. We go to Mass only when it works for us all and when we want to go. We feel this achieves more than by us feeling pressured to go each week' (Parent)*

*'We can still participate in a different language if we go to a cultural Mass' (Parent)*

Recognition of members of other Christian denominations and Faith groups and their contribution to the life of the School:

- School Board members who are active in their own Christian denomination or are from another Faith are members of the School Board
- Parents from other traditions have been invited into the schools to talk about their faith to the children

*'My kids ask curious questions about Church- they love saying hi to Father but get confused when they go to temple because of the differences in our traditions and culture but Multicultural day helped in understanding ' (Parent)*

*'We attended a community event with the Syro-Malabar Community to celebrate with our students who were receiving the– Sacraments of Confirmation / Holy Communion.' (APRIM)*

*"We have many families from the Indian Community. Some are Hindu and we visited the Temple and have tried to nurture that connection. We have the Muslim community across the road also and there is a big focus on family & youth. We went to a dinner there and there were young people from our school performing.' (Principal)*

## **8. School's strong social justice connections and care for Earth set an example for the Parish**

*The parish community is visibly engaged with those who experience poverty and need, and with those at the margins of society and church.*

*The parish witnesses to God's love for all the creatures of Earth.*

*Gospel Characteristics #5 & #6*

Schools are particularly engaged and committed to social justice and care for Earth.

- Shared Parish and School community gardens
- Active 'Mini Vinnies' programmes, with connections to the op shop in the Parish
- Soup or other meals prepared by students for families in need within the School and Parish (sometimes using produce from School/Parish community gardens)
- Equity with School Fees

Examples of projects and programs in partnership with Diocesan Agencies and other Catholic organisations include:

- There is great support for fundraising initiatives for Caritas, Catholic Charities, St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Missions and also charities relating to the school's charism. The children are aware of the causes they are supporting and there are opportunities for fun and social engagement,

such as with fun runs, walkathons and participating in the Hutt Street Centre's fundraiser "Walk a Mile in my Boots"

- St Vincent de Paul is often well connected across the School and the Parish.
- There is support for refugees with community and school families involvement
- Raising money for a family in the school who had lost their home through an accident

*'There is a great deal of compassion here which flows right through and an awareness of all in the community. The strength of the community is indicated by how well the most vulnerable are cared for' (Religious Sister)*

*'There is a multi-level school fee approach and our laptops are free' (Principal)*

*'We have faced issues of parents becoming homeless, the school has tried to help' (Principal)*

*'Parents are a resource to each other in times of need and cook meals for each other'*

*'12% of our students are in Government care- many Aboriginal families. Most of our families don't pay fees and that's okay.' (Principal)*

*"During Catholic Education week we had a focus on care for the poor and students were engaged in various activities to support projects financially and practically." (Teacher)*