

Philosophy of Education for Catholic Schools in the Province of British Columbia

A Policy Statement by the Catholic Bishops of British Columbia

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

At the beginning of the third millennium, all those involved in Catholic education are called to build communities of faith and holiness. In partnership with the family and the parish, the Catholic school participates in the saving mission of the Church. By evangelization, catechesis and works of service, the Catholic school builds up both the family of faith and human community. The Catholic school provides religious and moral reference points to help students critically examine the culture around them and build a society enlightened by the values of the

Gospel:

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

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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

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

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

A. Teaching the Whole Person

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

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

B. Faith Lived in Christian Community

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

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

C. Commitment to Justice and Compassion

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

III. PARENTS AS EDUCATORS

"Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that the primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs" (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, #20).

The school exists to complement the work of parents as the first teachers of their children. Parents should be involved with the life of the school by participating in school councils and committees and through regular collaboration with teachers.

IV. PASTORS

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

V. STAFF AS LIVING WITNESSES

Catholic educators are called to do much more than share religious knowledge. "Professionalism is marked by, and raised to, a supernatural Christian vocation" (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, # 37).

It is the personal witness and holiness of the teacher that will have the greatest impact on the students. Catholic educators should model collaboration, love of the faith, communion with the Church and concern for the poor and marginalized. They must be committed to leading their students to encounter Jesus and develop a relationship with Him that expresses itself in witness and service.

VI. RELIGIOUS FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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

VII. THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND NEW EVANGELIZATION

As the Catholic Bishops of British Columbia, we emphasize the Catholic school's central role at the beginning of the third millennium in the Church's work of evangelization, which must be new in ardor, methods and expression (*Church in America*, #6).

In setting forth principles to direct the Catholic schools of our province, we call for the commitment of students and parents, teachers and administrators, pastors and religious,

trustees and committee/council members, and the whole Catholic community to this great work.

VIII. REFERENCES

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

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

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

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

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

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

Catholic Independent Schools Vancouver Archdiocese Vision Statement

In living out our mission as members of the CISVA community,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Students will: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Parents will: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Staff Members will: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Pastors and Parish Education Committees will: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Board, assisted by the Superintendent's Office will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop an understanding of and share in the mission to proclaim and build the kingdom of God. • acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes to reach their fullest potential. • develop as balanced persons spiritually, emotionally, physically and intellectually. • respect others and be stewards over their environment. • share their talents and participate in all aspects of school life. • be Catholic leaders, responsible citizens and life-long learners. • be accountable for their role within the system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be committed to the mission to proclaim and build the kingdom of God. • be advocates for Catholic education. • work cooperatively with and support the administration and staff of the school. • support opportunities that foster student success. • treat others with respect. • be committed to fostering education that promotes strong Catholic leaders. • be accountable for their role within the system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carry out their role in the mission to proclaim and build the kingdom of God. • be committed to the development of the whole child. • plan for and support appropriate, challenging learning experiences and positive learning environments for all students. • be committed to build a Christian community and act with justice and integrity. • be committed to continuous personal and professional development. • treat others with respect. • be committed to fostering education that promotes strong Catholic leaders. • be accountable for their role within the system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be committed to the mission to proclaim and build the kingdom of God. • be committed to operating in an effective and efficient manner. • be committed to implementing policy and procedures as representatives of CISVA. • collaborate appropriately with staff. • be committed to serving all families. • promote high standards of education, conduct, safety, and the well being of students and staff. • treat others with respect. • be committed to fostering education that promotes strong Catholic leaders. • be accountable for their role within the system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide leadership in the proclamation and building of the kingdom of God. • be committed to operating in an effective and efficient manner. • be advocates for Catholic Schools with the Catholic community, the public and the government. • promote high standards of education, conduct and safety for all students and staff. • be responsible for the effective and efficient operation of each school. • treat others with respect. • be committed to fostering education that promotes strong Catholic leaders. • develop and provide strategic direction for the system. ■ supervise appropriate evaluation to ensure accountability throughout the system. adapted on October 1. 2002