

THE FINAL WORD



Another new year has begun and for many families another school year for their children. It's a busy and demanding time for parents, young people and the educators who serve them.

But the enormous effort is well worth it! For what a blessing our Catholic school communities are for the archdiocese and for our wider community

Our schools, both primary and secondary, are a vital pathway for many of our young people to encounter the joy of the Gospel.

Pope Francis has said, 'The joy of the Gospel is something to be experienced, something to be known and lived only through giving it away, through giving ourselves away.'

Is that not what we attempt to do in Catholic education here in Melbourne?

What Catholic education brings to the young people entrusted to our care is the perspective of faith. When we ask: How shall I live? What is the purpose of life? How should I direct my actions?—we find our response in Jesus Christ. His Gospel gives us a perspective inspired by the wisdom of God. Jesus offers his people the words of truth and everlasting life, 'For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth' (John 18:37). Today his teaching mission endures in those called to be Catholic educators.

We here in Australia are especially blessed with a system of support for religious schools that is rare to find in many places overseas. Our state and federal governments recognise the quality of care given to our young people by so many professionally dedicated teachers. We appreciate their generous support for our young Catholic Australians. Even some who do not share our faith come to our schools because they know that at its heart there is the acceptance of values motivated by our faith—values that present a specific vision or view of human life.

We realise, however, that we are not perfect and must continue to improve the quality of that care. We must be ever vigilant to protect our young people and ensure that our schools and parish communities provide a safe environment where our children can flourish. In the face of the tragic harm done to innocent children by some priests, religious and teachers, we Catholics renew our pledge to protect our children from all violence and abuse.

In 2017, let us continue then to build a vibrant and faith-filled Catholic education system. We are proud of our Catholic schools. They provide academically excellent education, faith-based formation that allows each student to develop a moral foundation on which to stand for the rest of their lives, and give our young people vision and hope as they enter into a complex and fast changing world.

Yes, Catholic schools are a gift to the whole community and are recognised as centres of learning that foster personal development and growth enriched with a sense of self-fulfillment and worth and guided by basic and essential moral values.

We look forward to the future of Catholic education here in Melbourne. Our schools are committed to an integrated vision of education which fosters a future generation. We are served by wonderful leadership from our principals, staff and parents and our Catholic Education Office that supports them so professionally.

May we all continue to be inspired by the challenge of Cardinal John Henry Newman. He called educators to form young Catholics who 'know their creed so well that they can give an account of it'. We Melbourne Catholics especially commit ourselves to this task that is so necessary for our young Catholics living in a pluralist secular society.

May God bless all who support Catholic education in the effort to make the Church's vision of life come true.

† Denis J Hart
Archbishop of Melbourne