Religious Education in Catholic Schools

Rationale

This policy will give expression to the purpose of religious education in Catholic Schools. It describes the nature and purposes of religious education, while acknowledging the diversity of religious backgrounds and experience of students in Catholic schools.

Religious education in the classroom assists students to understand and appreciate religion and the variety of ways of expressing religious beliefs. Classroom religious education is not directly focused on creating a religious experience as much as an educational exploration of religion.

The document The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988) from the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education makes the distinction between religious instruction and catechesis:

The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime ... this happens most especially in a local Church community. The aim of school, however, is knowledge. Religious instruction, therefore, should be integrated into the objectives and criteria which characterise a modern school. Like other course work, it should promote culture, and it should make use of the best educational methods available to schools today, (# 68, 69, 70)

The purpose of the classroom teaching of religious education therefore, is to help students become better informed and capable of thinking seriously about religion, acquiring knowledge, attitudes, values and skills.

Values

All people are created “in the image and likeness of God”, and so are imbued with a natural spiritual yearning. They seek to understand themselves in the light of the transcendent reflected in the world in which they live. They seek to know their own religious tradition and to see the connection between religion and other areas of human life and culture.
Policy Statement

All students in Catholic schools will be provided with opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of religion and to appreciate how religion can make a valuable contribution to their personal development and general education.

Consequences

- That all schools develop and teach from an accredited program that has been developed in accordance with the approved Diocesan Religious Education Guidelines.
- That the family is acknowledged as the first place where faith can be nurtured and ideally provide a wide variety of situations for education in faith throughout life.
- That classroom teaching of religion complements builds on and strengthens the family teaching of religion in the home.
- That students’ religious literacy is enhanced. Within this context, ecumenism is embraced and the faith tradition of each student is respected. All students are encouraged to deepen their understanding of their own faith tradition.
- That students are not merely passive recipients of religious education. They are given responsibility for active participation in religious education suited to their age, intellectual development and personal needs.
- That students are provided with opportunities to reflect on and address contemporary religious and social issues.
- That classroom religious education is interesting, relevant and satisfying for students.
- That teachers teach, assess and report religious education in the same way they approach the teaching, assessing and reporting of other key learning areas and employ a variety of teaching strategies in an academically challenging way.
- That appropriate allocation of time to teach religious education is reflected in the school timetable.
- That teachers seek appropriate integration of religious education with other key learning areas.
• That teachers of Religious Education are accredited.
• That appropriate training and in-service support is offered to ensure provision of quality religious education.

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