

“And all the children are above average” – the motto from Lake Wobegon is fast becoming the new normal. The world we now live in requires us to ensure that all our children can become above average if they are to have a good chance for success, in human and interpersonal development and in the job stakes in the decades ahead. But there is more – our faith demands that we take them along the path towards the fullest possible spiritual development, and this will help to enable them to bring their talents to making the world a better place.

Catholic schools are supporting students very well in all these areas, for which the Catholic community and many outside that community give thanks. It is a pleasure to bring together a range of articles that contribute to schools’ ability to do their very best for our children. Gratitude is expressed to our writers.

Best practice is, of course, going to be central to our next national Catholic Education Convention, 8-10 August, in Wellington. A significant number of schools and tertiary teaching staff have already committed to offering seminars. Our theme for the convention is Ngā Taonga – the treasure. How do we present the treasure that is our Catholic faith, and what does it mean in New Zealand in the 21st century? The deep wisdom and the spiritual riches that make up Catholicism must always be made to come alive for the next generation, and placed at the service of the world. The convention will help us to reflect on these matters. We encourage you to register as soon as possible after 1 May, when online registration opens via the NZCEO website (see the link to the conference website). We look forward to seeing you there.

Susan Apáthy

Growing our Faith Tradition – Five Tried and Tested Practices

Kieran Fouhy, Principal, St Peter’s College, Auckland

At a funeral I attended recently, the hymn “Faith of Our Fathers” was sung stirringly, including those 19th century words “dungeon, fire and sword” and “How sweet... if they ... could die for thee.” Definitely words I had heard from my childhood in the faith ghetto in which I was raised, but words lost in the secular, nanosecond world in which the present generation might need to consult Google as to a definition of commitment, before they would be tortured (fire), imprisoned (dungeon), or die (sword) for their faith!

So one of the tasks for 2012 is how do we increase our students’ commitment to their faith (including the faith tradition) and their community (church)?

One phrase – ‘use the ordinary’.

There are some tried and tested practices that can help to build a faith community in our Catholic schools.

1. The **power of slogans** where students assemble. These are the hidden curriculum of daily living.

“Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with your God” (Micah) is in many schools at the front of assembly halls etc. But what about an annual slogan on the building as students come into the school? E.g. “Courage: The good seed with grow.” “Truth - what is that?” “Who do you say that I am?” Or for 2012, amidst a widely reported and misinterpreted Mayan prophecy that the world will end – “Be not afraid”.

What about the leadership statement above the student leaders’ photos? Leadership: The Art of Serving Others in Community. “Whoever wishes to be first must place himself last and be the servant of others.”

These slogans act as a constant reminder that the Gospel message is about ordinary human living.

2. The **power of rituals** to build a culture of faith. A boys’ school runs on routine and ritual and if these are structured properly security in learning and faith is the outcome. There is our ritual of the Sign of the Cross – but what about a whole school assembly every day where the whole college community hears the Gospel reading, a faith reflection from the senior boys and of course sage wisdom from the principal!

3. The **power of silent reflection** in retreats: senior boys are given the opportunity for essentially a silent, in-depth retreat experience for three days! The model is that of the Jesuit-created Kairos Retreat where chronological time is suspended and Kairos (waiting), God’s time, becomes the reality. These retreats work! St Peter’s College has big waiting lists of boys willing to go on these retreats in their own time. There is also a Quest retreat whereby the whole of year 12 (170) act as retreat mentors to the whole of year 9 (180) – in their own time.

4. The **power of linking faith rituals with human celebrations**. What about the 1st XV rugby team, the 1st XI soccer and hockey teams combined with the concert band being present at the sacramental Mass where big numbers of boys receive the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, 1st Communion and Confirmation. This Mass of Initiation is followed by 1st XV dinner and 1st XI dinners with students and parents!
5. The **power of knowledge** where senior Religious Education students are required to theologise and philosophise in-depth. Junior students learn their traditions and the scriptures. Personal timetables may specify, for example. 9A Scripture, 13L Theology, 11D Philosophy etc. Just as science is divided into biology, chemistry, physics, so Religious Education is seen as scripture, theology, church history etc. Being knowledgeable and articulate about the faith tradition is important for students' belief in that tradition. (Note that St Peter's College has permission to operate some variants of the mandated national Religious Education curriculum.)

We are often reminded that there is nothing new in education – merely the same ideas repackaged and recycle. As an education academic commented, “Education is about sending living messages to a future time.”

The tail that is no more

Paul Engles, Principal, St Mary's School Northcote, and Felise Naufahu, Tongan Community

St Mary's School, Northcote is a decile 7 school on Auckland's North Shore. The school draws from wide socio economic and geographical areas across three parishes. The area is diverse with students from both ends of the decile scale, 10 – 1A. It is also populated by many ethnic groups (18 in all) from refugees through to new immigrants from Europe. This brings many challenges to the learners and teachers.

The school collects and analyses data each year and plots the progress of its learners. The data continually pointed to one ethnic group, Tongan being the tail in the school. In 2008 the school made a decision to set about targeting and supporting the removal of this tail.

The school had already put several programmes in place to support students at entry to the school, namely alphabet group, progressing onto a vocabulary group (for language acquisition). This was having some effect but not nearly enough.

The Team One leader (Year 1 and 2) and the Principal decided that it was important to do two things: to put before the Tongan community the facts about their children's achievement/non achievement, and to work

alongside them in transforming the whole Tongan community's perspective on education. A draft plan detailing how we could engage with and support the group was formulated, the rule being 'at no \$ cost'.

Felise Naufahu from the Tongan Community takes this up from his perspective:

The Principal alerted the Tongan parents to his concern about Tongan students' achievement. There was a need to spend a lot of effort to support and work with students to bring their academic result up to the school's expectation. This was a very big challenge to us and we wanted to find an effective way to make it happen. With support from the Principal we decided to call a meeting with all parents of Tongan students here in St Mary's. After several attempts to meet with these parents we found that we were going nowhere. We decided to try another communication strategy. Sending letters didn't work that well so we decided to visit each home and have a face-to-face conversation. This worked really well. Another meeting was called. All parents attended, which gave us an opportunity to discuss as a group how we were going to help our children. Teachers had done their best; we needed to show our children that we also value their education.

The first part of the plan was to invite Tongan parents into the Year 1 and 2 learning areas (classes) to observe the teachers and students during reading time. The purpose was to expose them to reading techniques, including questioning skills etc, to enable them to learn from the teachers. They would also be asked to share Tongan readers with the class, modelling the techniques they had learned from the teachers. The parents, apprehensive at first, began to learn alongside the students (Ako) and were supported by a willing staff. These parents were able to relay and model for other parents unable to be at school, how to listen to and support reading etc. As a result of this learning a homework centre was proposed. We needed to give our children extra help. The centre was started outside of school to support the needs of the Tongan parents and children.



▲ *Learning is sharing at St Mary's School, Northcote, Auckland.*

Amongst the Tongan parents we have two qualified teachers who were also willing to assist in the homework centre. We drew up a roster which operated our home centre three nights a week. The homework centre started with a set time of one hour every night, three times a week. The two teachers are always present. Some parents are rostered to provide transport and security. The centre provides time to assist children with their reading, writing, maths and other assigned homework from school.

Owing to transport problems for some of the children we decided to move our homework centre to parish halls in Glenfield, Northcote and Beach Haven. We were also lucky to use a room at school if we needed to. We operated the homework centre for three years.

After the first year we were approached by the Principal saying that there had been a gradual rise in the overall progress shown by our Tongan children. This was great news, but there was more to do. Tongan parents continue to hang in there and continue to support our homework centre.

Meditating With Children at School

Sister Ema Konokono dolc, Our Lady's Home of Compassion, Island Bay

In 2009 I attended a course in Wellington on Teaching Christian Meditation to Children, run by Ruth Fowler from Australia, where a diocese-wide initiative to teach children to meditate had been running since 2006. Ruth was the co-founder of the Christian Meditation Community in Australia.

Following the course I approached Celeste Hastings, Principal of Holy Cross School in Miramar, Wellington, who was delighted to have me teach meditation there. I began with class groups. I taught the children the importance of stillness and silence in our relationship with God. We began with a meditation period of two minutes, and gradually extend meditation time up to eleven minutes for Year Eight students.

The resources I received at the course have been very helpful. These were 'Coming Home. A Guide to Teaching Meditation to Children' by Ernie Christie, John Garratt Publishing, 2008. This includes a DVD.

'My Happy Heart' (Prayer of the Heart), Gregory Ryan, includes a CD.

The official website of the World Community for Christian Meditation is www.wccm.org

I was fortunate to have the experience and resources developed by Hugh McLaughlin, who had been working in some Catholic schools prior to when I started. Hugh is the current New Zealand contact person for the World Community for Christian Meditation,

begun by Benedictine monk John Main and now directed by Lawrence Freeman osb.

When the practice of meditating is established in one school, I move on to other schools and just return from time to time to support the teachers who are continuing to meditate with the children. I have now worked in four schools and been approached by another two, to begin the practice of meditation with their children this year.

My experience has been that children take the meditation time very seriously, and do not seem to have the problem I expected, of remaining still and silent. This is particularly noticeable with junior children. I have been really encouraged to hear from children who are now meditating at home.

Children have described their experience of meditation as 'feeling relaxed'; 'the warmth of the candle - Jesus light of the world'; 'loved by Jesus'; 'feeling peace'; 'joy'; 'happy'; 'surprise'; 'Jesus is holding my hand and walking with me at the beach'; 'hearing the birds singing is like Jesus calling me'. There are some children who do not feel anything, but appreciate the silence, and of course this is the ideal.

I would love to see meditation in every Catholic primary school. Starting at the primary level is the best, I believe, as children have a natural openness to this way of prayer. Teaching them a structured way of praying in silence together has great benefits.

After three years, to our amazement the Principal informed us that there has been a big shift in the overall result for our Tongan students. They now meet the requirements of the curriculum level and most of them are scoring at the school's target level (above the national standards). What a big relief to every Tongan parent to be able to see the result of us working together to support our children.

As an outcome of the cooperation and working together on this project the members of the Tongan community feel a sense of achievement both for themselves and for their children. Parents are able to walk into the school with heads held high, knowing that with continued support they are able to provide for their children and enable them to be successful learners.

The latest ERO report, in December 2011, noted, "Approximately 8% of students attending the school are of Pacific ethnicities. Many of these students are making very good progress. Recent initiatives to build stronger partnerships with Pacific parents have had positive outcomes for the students."

I hadn't expected the great impact that the experience of meditating with the children would have on me. It has been a wonderful experience!

The official website of the World Community for Christian Meditation is: www.wccm.org. It gives further information about Christian meditation.

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▲ *Young meditators and Sr Ema at Cardinal McKeefry School, Wilton, Wellington.*

New Zealand Catholic Education Convention, Wellington, 8-10 August 2012

Ngā Taonga – Living the Treasure

Ko te taonga o taku ngākau, ko taku kura e.

We celebrate our precious treasure, our Catholic faith, our Catholic education.

The whakataukī above, entrusted to us for this convention by Danny Karatea Goddard of Te Runanga o Te Hahi Katorika Ki Aotearoa, expresses the depth of our commitment to the treasure which is Catholic education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We will celebrate many examples of shining practice in education, and will be inspired by our international speakers. Fr Michael Holman S.J., Principal of Heythrop College, University of London, who has just completed a six-year term of office as Provincial Superior of the British Jesuits, will bring to us his wide ranging educational, pastoral, administrative and leadership skills, and his qualifications in philosophy, theology and educational

administration. He is known as a deeply intelligent thinker on the issues of contemporary society, and in particular on the issues of youth, and their education. He will present a keynote and two seminars.

Megan McKenna is an internationally known author, theologian, peace and justice advocate, poet, photographer and story teller. She presents the gospel message in compelling ways, and calls us to consider our personal faith stories, in the light of the Gospels. She too will present a keynote and two seminars.

During the convention we will look at elements of our history. Part of the treasure that we hold today will be celebrated with a

book launch – Brendan Schollum has written a history of key religious congregations in New Zealand that have played a significant role in the development of Catholic education. And we will look to the future, with an emphasis on what it might mean to be a Catholic teacher, student, person in the 21st century, and specifically, for schools, how the digital resources for teaching Religious Education can best be used in the classroom. A digital hub will be a special focus.

Information about the convention can be accessed from www.nzceo.org.nz. There is a link to the conference website on the Homepage. Registration opens online on 1 May 2012.



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