Dear Parents

I hope that the back-to-school activities of recent weeks have been marked by high levels of enthusiasm in your household. I trust also that you have started the year with good measures of confidence in and goodwill towards Catholic education and your chosen Catholic school.

I warmly welcome those of you who are beginning an association with Catholic education. Certainly one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is a high quality education. May the journey ahead be happy and rewarding for you and your child.

A Catholic school is not a stand-alone enterprise. On the contrary, it is a crucial part of the mission of the Church. The Archbishop and bishops of Melbourne, local parishes, parish clergy, religious institutes and the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) all work together with schools to deliver a distinctive Catholic education that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that offers a clear account of Catholic teaching, adapted to the level of your child’s understanding.

In addition to this collaboration, a Catholic school works at its very best when parents are involved in their children’s learning and development. To this end, this letter provides information about Catholic education that may well be of interest as you proceed through 2009.

Religious Education and Faith Development

In June 2008 Archbishop Hart launched the Primary Religious Education Curriculum Framework, Coming to Know, Worship and Love, based on the To Know, Worship and Love texts. The Framework was developed by the CEOM, the Vicariate for Religious Education and teams of primary teachers and religious education coordinators throughout the Archdiocese.

A similar framework for secondary schools was released in 2005. What is distinctive about both frameworks is that they establish learning standards to support teaching, assessment and reporting in religious education. The end-of-year report will describe student achievement in religious education against these standards. Due to its importance, the religious education report will be placed at the beginning of each student’s report.

Educating our children in the Catholic faith is a complex and challenging task. Therefore, I am proud of the continuing development of religious education in this Archdiocese that responds to this contemporary world and supports the partnership between Catholic schools, parishes, and families.

National Curriculum

Many of you will be aware of the Australian Government’s intention to implement a national curriculum for all students K–12 by 2011, beginning with English, mathematics, science and history. Framing papers which propose broad directions for what teachers should teach and young people should learn in these curriculum areas have been released by the new body, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The authority is consultative and eager to listen to those of you interested in curriculum provision. You can read the framing papers and submit a response via the website www.ncb.org.au. Note that the consultation process remains open to the end of February 2009.
Catholic Education Week is an annual event wherein Catholic schools showcase the creativity and talent of their students and the commitment and dedication of their teaching staffs. This year it will be held from 14 to 20 March and your involvement in activities organised by your school will be welcomed. In addition, I warmly invite you to events organised by the CEOM – the St Patrick’s Day Mass for Schools (17 March), the annual concert in the Fitzroy Gardens after the Mass, the Visual Arts Exhibition (14–20 March) and the Catholic Education Week Address (19 March). Further details are available on the CEOM website (refer address below).

Government Funding Issues

In October 2008 the Victorian State Government announced an injection of additional funds for the Catholic sector of $24.3M, to be distributed in 2008, and a further $14.6M to be distributed in 2009. These funds will not only enable improved physical facilities at schools but will free up other funds within Catholic school budgets to meet additional operational costs. The grass roots campaign at local levels played a major role in achieving this result and I wish to thank the parent groups that effectively lobbied their local members of parliament about the resourcing needs of Catholic schools.

We are grateful that the State Government recognised the need for urgent assistance with the escalating costs of education. Your continued support will be required in 2009 and beyond as we enter into negotiations with the State Government for a new quadrennial funding agreement (2010–2013). Your school principal and board and will keep you informed of issues and developments in this area.

Parent Support

Parent Seminar Program. This program has been running in the Archdiocese for over 17 years at a range of locations around Melbourne. Popular seminar topics in 2008 included Raising Boys, Understanding Girls, How to Bully-proof your Child, and Emotional Learning. The workshops on the transition from primary to secondary school were also very popular. Seminars in 2009 will feature expert presenters in the areas of cyber-bullying, conflict management and peer relationships. For more information refer to the Parent section of the CEOM website (address below) and to the first edition of Catholic Education Today, which should be delivered to you via your child during Term 1.

Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB). 2008 was the third full year of operation of the VCSPB. Its goal is to support Catholic education and its Council members have worked tirelessly to increase its communication channels with parents in Catholic schools. The VCSPB has contributed to a number of consultation processes on educational issues including the Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians, the changes to the payments of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) funds, and the proposed National Curriculum. It has also defended Catholic schools in the media and supported the Victorian Catholic system’s campaign for additional government funding. You can find out more about the VCSPB by visiting its website www.vcsbp.vic.catholic.edu.au.
**Improvements to School Infrastructure**

The provision of well-maintained, high-quality and sustainable learning environments remains an ongoing challenge and high priority for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. In 2008, 12 schools received grants from the Victorian Government’s Needs-based Capital Program, with a further 14 projects funded by the Australian Government’s Capital Grants Program. In addition, two new Australian Government initiatives – the Trade Training Centres Program and the National Computers in Secondary Schools Program – commenced delivering much-needed capital funding and infrastructure into our secondary schools.

Certainly school revitalisation and refurbishment have a strong impact on school morale, parental choice and community pride. I thank parents who generously contribute their time to maintaining school facilities and who support fundraising activities to advance refurbishment programs. On our part, you can be assured of continued and concerted efforts to seek the necessary government assistance for school improvements and new facilities.

**Principal and Teacher Awards**

Our principals and teachers continue to be recognised for excellence in a variety of fields and endeavours. Paul Tobias from St Joseph’s College, Geelong, was named Secondary Principal of the Year at the 2008 Herald Sun Teacher of the Year Awards. This award represented the fourth consecutive year in which a Catholic secondary school principal was named Secondary Principal of the Year.

Other Catholic principals and teachers were also prominent in various award categories, including Megan Moore, principal of Doxa School, West Melbourne (finalist in the Secondary Principal category); Leon Colla, principal of Queen of Peace Primary School, Altona Meadows (finalist in the Primary Principal category); Maggie Catterall, St Monica’s Primary School, Footscray (finalist in the Primary Individual category); Geraldine Greenland, Our Lady of Sion College, Box Hill (finalist in the Secondary Individual category); and Jennifer Mansfield, John Paul College, Frankston (finalist in the Secondary Graduate category).

Bernadette Summers, former principal of St Michael’s School, North Melbourne, accepted $15,000 on behalf of the school for a 2008 National Quality Schooling Award. St Michael’s was Highly Commended in the category, Excellence in Family-School Partnerships.

My congratulations to all these award-winners who exemplify the professionalism, ethos and spirit of Catholic education.
Achievement in Catholic Schools

Literacy and Numeracy

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an Australia-wide testing program of literacy and numeracy for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN was held for the first time in May 2008, replacing the former state-wide Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) testing. NAPLAN provides the data for calculation of national benchmark achievement for five domains (Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy). In 2008, the performance of students in Victorian Catholic schools included:

- **Year 3 students** – For each domain, over 98% achieved results at or above the national benchmark, including 98.8% in Writing.
- **Year 5 students** – For each domain, over 96% achieved results at or above the national benchmark.
- **Year 7 students** – For each domain, over 97% achieved results at or above the national benchmark, including 99.0% in Numeracy.
- **Year 9 students** – For each domain, over 95% achieved results at or above the national benchmark, including 98.2% in Numeracy.

VCE and VCAL Results

As in recent years, VCE results in 2008 reflected sound performance on a variety of measures:

- 24 Catholic students were among the State’s highest achievers;
- 95% of Catholic schools had a median study score at or above the average range (28–32);
- 94% of Catholic schools had satisfactory VCE completion rates of at least 97 per cent.

All Catholic schools had some students studying in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) program, which combines general VCE studies with vocational training and experience in the workplace. Seventy per cent of Catholic schools had high rates of satisfactory completion in VET (i.e. at least 75 per cent of units passed).

In addition, the number of Catholic schools offering the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) increased in 2008. The VCAL is an alternative to the VCE and provides work-related experience, literacy and numeracy learning, and opportunities to build personal skills that are important for life and work. Eighty per cent of Catholic schools offered this alternative in 2008.

As indicated in the Table of 2007 student destinations (post Year 12), most Catholic students undertook tertiary studies or further education and training after Year 12.

Conclusion

This year four new Catholic primary schools open their doors for the first time – Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Wyndam Vale; St Joseph’s, Mernda; Mother Teresa Primary School, Craigieburn North; and St George Preca in Caroline Springs North. My best wishes are extended to the pioneer families who will almost certainly play a critical role in shaping the school’s identity and community life.

A Catholic school performs its greatest service when its students embrace learning, live the Catholic faith in the spirit of Jesus Christ, experience genuine wellbeing and grow in confidence and hope. My profound hope is that in 2009 this is your child’s reality. May all of us with a vested interest in Catholic education look to this year with shared optimism and confidence.

Stephen Elder  
Director of Catholic Education