Director’s Message

I trust that each of you is starting this year with renewed energy and a refreshed spirit, ready to embrace all that the year offers.

I am grateful for your commitment to Catholic education and your service to school, parish and the wider community. Thank you for your continuing work and support in 2015.

I draw your attention to Catholic Education Week 2015 to be held on 15–22 March. The theme is Seek God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 4: 29). The Mass of St Patrick for Schools and Concert will be held on Tuesday 17 March, as will the Young Speakers Colloquium. Viewing days for the Visual Arts Exhibition are 17–22 March and the Visual Arts Awards Ceremony will be held on Sunday 22 March. For more information see your principal or school newsletter.

Best wishes

Stephen Elder
Executive Director of Catholic Education

It would be appreciated if a copy of this newsletter could be provided to board members or school parent group.

Professional learning for school boards in 2015

Members of Catholic school boards looking to improve their knowledge and skills and enhance their contributions to their children’s school may like to participate in the following Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) activities.

Seminar for new primary school board members
The CEOM school board seminar program is most relevant to new primary school board members. Topics include:
• role and function of the school board
• place of the school board in the community
• key attributes of an effective board member
• structure and proceedings of board meetings.

This seminar is repeated three times, on 25 March, 5 May and 27 May at the Catholic Leadership Centre, 576 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne.

Board members interested in attending the seminars should seek their school principal’s assistance to register through IPLS on the CEVN website http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au under Professional Learning / My PL (IPLS).

Meetings and networks for board chairs
Board chairs may be interested in joining a CEOM network. The primary and secondary board chair networks meet face to face twice a year. To join a network, contact Patricia Palman on 9267 0228 or via email ppalman@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.

The Primary Network meetings are scheduled for 13 May, 4 June and 2 September at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne.

The Secondary Network meetings are on 18 March and 12 August at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne.

Project Compassion 2015
The theme for Project Compassion 2015 is ‘Food for Life’. Project Compassion 2015 through Caritas Australia is helping the world’s poorest people establish sustainable food, walking with them as they free themselves from the burden of food insecurity and develop new, improved income streams for a better future.

Find out more and how you can help at www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion/about
Resources

Resources for primary school boards and college boards are located on the CEVN website http://cevn.cec.v.catholic.edu.au under School Improvement / Parish–School Boards.

Guidelines for college boards include a Model Constitution, a brief guide for canonical administrators on the governance of the college, and information on the responsibilities and management of a regional / diocesan college board.

A Guide for Parish Education Boards provides information, videos, practical tips and sample documents relating to:
- the purposes and responsibilities of boards
- board membership
- developing an effective board
- the operations of the board
- business of the board.

Some of the information in this Guide is also relevant to secondary college boards.

Past copies of the quarterly Board Business newsletter are available at www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/our-schools/school-boards/

The Australian Catholic University provides customised onsite governance programs offering:
- a detailed overview of key corporate governance legislative requirements and responsibilities for board members
- in-depth detailing of corporate governance practices
- practical ideas and tips for board members to consider in fulfilling their corporate governance obligations
- optional afternoon planning workshop.

Participants will have the opportunity to discuss current challenges and will be provided with the tools and frameworks to approach their situation from a fresh perspective. For more information contact Gillian McCaughey via email gillian.mccaughey@acu.edu.au.

NEW Community Conversations

Community conversations are a communication strategy for all school communities. Work that emerged from the CEOM Family–School Partnership initiative (2010–2013) with the support of Dr George Otero from the Centre from Relational Learning, New Mexico, shows the practice of community conversations can lead to improved understanding and connectedness for whole-school communities, and improved learning outcomes for students. This CEOM resource:

- identifies the key characteristics of community conversations
- outlines where, when and how such conversations can be supported
- and the skills, attitudes and processes essential for
- the successful implementation of a community
- conversations approach within a school community.

Risk Management – School Camps and Excursions

(Schools should also refer to the circular dated 30 January 2015 for further information on this topic).

School camps and excursions and trips are often enjoyable activities, but are becoming a key risk for schools.

The consequences of a serious accident or incident on a school trip can be traumatic for a school community and very damaging for the school involved.

‘So what can a school do to protect its students and itself?’

Firstly, a school will need to develop a policy and a set of procedures that should be followed in order to help it manage the various risks associated with regular off-campus activities, day trips, overnight excursions and international/interstate trips.

The policy should outline a set of general principles to be followed in the planning of excursions in order to minimise the risks, such as the requirement for a management plan of each excursion to be completed beforehand. The management plan should identify the risks posed by the particular excursion and outline the strategies to mitigate each of the risks. Final approval of an excursion will only be granted by a principal if they are satisfied the risks have been appropriately identified and addressed in a management plan.

Steps a school should take in developing an excursion management plan include:
- consulting with students, staff, parents and external providers regarding the nature of the excursion and the potential hazards
- providing full details of the excursion to students and their parents/carers
- ensuring all students have suitable clothing and safety equipment for the excursion
- developing a supervision strategy and ensuring there are supervisors with appropriate skills and experience (including first aid)
- ensuring there are appropriate emergency response procedures in place
- conducting due diligence on all external providers involved in an excursion to ensure their competence and compliance with WHS regulations

http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au
requesting from parents/carers up-to-date details of any medical conditions which may provide a heightened risk to a student on an excursion
- ensuring the skills required for a particular activity are appropriate for a student’s capacity
- ensuring appropriate insurance coverage is in place.

The management of excursions should include debriefings following school trips, where staff can outline areas of risks not previously considered that may be factored into future management plans. Schools should keep records from each school trip, from the management plan; names and contacts of students, staff and teacher in charge; contracts entered into with any third-party organisations; risk assessments; and records of any incidents that may have occurred on an excursion.

Ref: www.schoolgovernance.net.au/2014/03/14/school-excursions-how-to-manage-the-risks/

Resource: DET School Policy and Advisory Guide

Building better boards

USING THE TALENTS ENTRUSTED TO YOU FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS

Pope Francis’ Angelus Address: Do Not Preserve God’s Grace in a Safe! Says Christians Are Called To Use ‘Talents’ For the Benefit of Others
By Junno Arocho Esteves, 16 November 2014

God calls us to make the wealth He has entrusted to us grow, not to lock it in a safe. This was the theme of Pope Francis’ address during Sunday’s Angelus prayer. The Holy Father reflected on the Gospel of St Matthew, which recalled the parable of the talents: a parable, he said, with a ‘very clear’ meaning.

‘The man of the parable represents Jesus, we are the servants and the talents are the wealth the Lord entrusts to us,’ he said. ‘What is this wealth? His Word, the Eucharist, faith in the Heavenly Father, His forgiveness, so many things. In short, his most precious goods.’

The Holy Father noted that while the word ‘talent’ is often referred to someone’s exceptional skill in music or sports, its use in the Gospel is meant to represent the goods given to the faithful by the Lord. However, like the servant who buried his talent, Christians may also block ‘the creativity and fruitfulness of love’ out of fear.

‘Jesus does not ask us to preserve His Grace in a safe!’ the Pope exclaimed. ‘He wants us to use it for the benefit of others and that’s how it grows. It’s as if He tells us: “Here is my mercy, my tenderness, my forgiveness: take it and use it.”’

‘And what have we done with it? Who have we “infected” with our faith? How many people have we encouraged with our hope? How much love have we shared with our neighbour?’

The 77-year-old Pontiff went on to say that the talents entrusted to the faithful can only bear fruit through ‘the Christian presence and witness’. The parable calls Christians to not bury the Word of the Gospel, but ‘to make it circulate in our life, in our relationships, in our concrete situations.’

Departing from his prepared remarks, the Pope called on those present in St Peter’s Square to read and meditate on the parable of the talents. He also called on them to ask whether they make the talents entrusted to them by God ‘grow in others’ or ‘preserved in a safe.’

Prior to reciting the Angelus prayer, Pope Francis urged the faithful to not be fooled by fear and to remember that ‘God trusts us’ with the talents he has given.

‘Do not be fooled by fear,’ he said. ‘Reciprocate trust with trust!’

For the full text of the Pope’s address, go to: www.zenit.org/en/articles/on-the-parable-of-the-talents

Reflect and consider

CATHOLIC IDENTITY: CHURCH and FAMILY

‘The first duty of a Catholic school is to bear witness through educational means to the splendour of truth, especially the truths of the Christian faith. Fund-raising, prestige, academic ranking and successful sports programs are important, but if school authorities forfeit their school’s true Catholic identity in their effort to achieve them, they fail in their first duty to their constituencies and to the Church, and worse, they betray Christ.’

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‘The Holy Family is the icon of the domestic Church, called to pray together. The family is the domestic Church and must be the first school of prayer. It is in the family that children, from the tenderest age, can learn to perceive the meaning of God, also thanks to the teaching and example of their parents: to live in an atmosphere marked by God’s presence.’

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 28 December 2011

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