Director’s Message

The Year of Grace announced by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, commenced on 26 May 2012. It is a time to renew efforts for all of us to better understand Christ through a renewed spirituality. I encourage you to join with the Catholic Church community in this year of prayer and reflection, incorporating it in your daily lives and your valuable work on boards.

Catholic school students have sat the NAPLAN test this term. These tests are just one part of the education story. There is a lot more to a Catholic education than test results and the development of the whole person is crucial to every individual’s formative years.

Our work continues in ensuring fair funding for Victorian Catholic schools which is then distributed to best meet the needs of students, schools and communities. I will continue to keep you informed and will seek the assistance of you and the parents in your school to support our work.

Lastly, I bring to your attention a new online resource for parish education boards available on our intranet http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au at the Parish-School Boards page under School Improvement and in part on www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.

With every good wish,

Stephen Elder
Executive Director of Catholic Education

Year of Grace

The Meaning Behind the Year of Grace

By Lucy Carroll, Archbishop’s Office for Evangelisation

In late 2011, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference announced that the Church of Australia would be entering a Year of Grace, from Pentecost 2012 to Pentecost 2013. The decision was inspired by Blessed Pope John Paul II who, in his apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, challenged the church to ‘contemplate the face of Christ’ and to ‘start afresh’ from Christ. While it is an undertaking for the whole Australian Church, the Year of Grace is not seen as one, singular event. Rather, it is an invitation to embark on a spiritual journey – a year-long retreat – to renew and refocus ourselves and our work on Christ.

The bishops have stressed that the Year of Grace is not meant to replace existing programs but instead to complement and strengthen efforts. It is not solely a theological exercise either, but a call to experience Christ afresh – inviting people to know Jesus versus know about Jesus. The Year of Grace is a chance for those working at all levels of the Church to question: What has this got to do with Jesus? How is this leading others to know Jesus?

The Call to ‘Name and Claim’ Grace

The Year of Grace is an opportunity for naming and claiming the ‘graces’ in our lives – and recognising these graces as gifts from God. This ‘naming’ begins with the question, ‘Where is Jesus in my life?’ It is an opportunity to invite Catholics to be more attentive to the signs of Christ’s presence in their everyday lives.

In the first 2012 issue of the Kairos Catholic Journal, the Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, wrote:

As we enter a new year, what is it that you are most hoping for, most praying for?

In the language of the Church, these hopes and joys and chances for new beginnings are referred to as
‘graces’ – gifts from God received as particular favours, undeserved gifts, or special benefits (cf Catechism §2003).

God gives all sorts of graces to his people, both spiritual and temporal, according to our need ... God gives them to us to use in service of his Church and his world (p. 2).

At its heart, the Year of Grace is an invitation to experience Christ anew and to challenge ourselves and others to find new ways of experiencing Christ in our lives. It is an opportunity for all those engaged in the work of the Church, schools, parishes and communities of the Melbourne Archdiocese, to consolidate and, collectively, be ‘refreshed’ in our mission of evangelisation.

Elements of the Year of Grace

The Year of Grace is built around three elements:

- Prayer
- The Word of God (reflecting on the Scriptures)
- Key Liturgical Celebrations.

Through each of these elements we are invited to contemplate the face of Christ, repent on our failures and listen to the voice of the Spirit as we begin afresh.

To learn more about the Year of Grace, contact the Archbishop’s Office for Evangelisation at (03) 9926 5761 or office@evangelisation.org.au.

Reflect and consider

OUTWARD FACING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Each school and board within its context faces the challenge of the ongoing, everyday work of building and strengthening family, school, and community partnerships for learning in sustainable ways. How then can the messages be interpreted, conversations continued and the challenges taken up in the busyness of daily life?

Outward facing schools refers to the notion that schools are well placed to open their doors to the community in which they operate to enhance learning for young people, and to strengthen connectedness and belonging. The term recognizes the particularly important role of parents in the education of their children, and supports the notion that the school, parish and the broader community further contributes to this.

In June 2011, the CEOM hosted Australia’s inaugural ‘Outward Facing Schools’ conference Look Out 2011. Experts from England, and the United States outlined current thinking and challenges about this concept, and conversations were entered into about how schools can re-form the way they work with families and community within the context of twenty-first century learning environments. Some of the presentations are available at www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/Conferences_-_Look_Out_2011.

The CEOM worked in partnership with VicHealth, the University of Melbourne, Australian Catholic University and CatholicCare to develop a Charter for promoting outward facing school communities. This Charter provides principles of an outward facing school and was developed to act as a vehicle for continuing the conversation in schools, in communities and across systems. The Charter provides the context, concepts and principles of outward facing school communities and is a call to action. It describes where we are now in terms of evidence and thinking, and signposts where we might lead.

Consider the following:

- Using the Charter to engage in conversations about your school: Is it an outward facing school? What are our challenges in engaging with school, parish and broader community? How does the board support and encourage an outward facing school?
- Using the Charter to enlarge your understanding of parent engagement and how it is embedded in your school.
- Using the Charter to inform and grow your board, its goals and activities.

Building better boards

ENCOURAGING CONVERSATION

Conversation creates positive connections, builds good relationships and provides an opportunity to explore ideas and proposals.

Conversation best occurs in an environment of trust (open and honest communication), mutual respect (value and appreciation of others) and mindfulness (responsibility for own words and actions).

The art of conversation takes practice and requires each person to participate, to actively listen, to ask clarifying questions and to give time to allow the conversation to flow, the topic to develop and understanding to be gained.

Boards can benefit from meetings where there are conversations which support reports and information sharing.