



## **2B: The parish / school relationship – building the most effective partnership**

In his workshop presentation Chris will explore with us possible ways forward in the relationship between parish and school – a challenging ministry but one with enormous promise.

**Chris Duthie-Jung** has spent many years working in ministry with young Catholics and recently he completed his doctoral studies focusing on the Catholic identity of Gen Y New Zealanders. He currently works as Director of the National Centre for Religious Studies, within the Catholic Institute of Aotearoa NZ (TCI). He is married to Veronika and lives in Lower Hutt with their three children – Ben, Johannes and Anna.

To start off the workshop Chris asked all the participants to introduce themselves and share their response to the question: what is your experience of parish/school relationship?

Here are a couple of key points that I picked up from that discussion:

- Teachers and DRs are very busy, head students and Catholic Character Students too. But they are willing!
- Important to form relationships
- For many, school is church, it is the only faith community people have
- There is a difference between RE which is Religious Education and ministry which is more experiential.

We spent most of the workshop looking at the new document Catholic Education of School-Age Children. We particularly looked at paragraphs 50-56:

50. Many of the Catholic character activities schools undertake with their students outside the religious education programme have the potential to lead students to that intimate encounter with God which is the beginning of an adult commitment to Jesus Christ and his Church.

51. The emphasis at the national level on religious education is important and necessary, but similar attention needs to be paid to the aspects of Catholic character outside the religious education programme which belong to the encounter stage of the journey of discipleship. These include good experiences of prayer and liturgy, regular access to the sacraments (including Reconciliation), and retreats which are truly Catholic and spiritual in nature.

52. Teaching students to pray in different ways and providing well-prepared opportunities for them to do so is essential. For many students this is the only time in their lives someone will assist them with prayer. Providing regular opportunities to receive the sacraments is critical, as is adequate preparation for their reception. Bringing the sacraments to young people in schools encourages them to love and appreciate them before they have to start finding them for themselves as adults.

53. It is vitally important that schools do not combine these activities with other school events in a way which obscures the spiritual objective. Retreats must be true retreats with a spiritual focus, not a camp with a spiritual overlay. A school Mass is an opportunity for building community, but the emphasis on school spirit should not be at the expense of the meaning of the Mass and the reception of Jesus in the Eucharist who, through the Holy Spirit, is the source of every charism.

54. A school for young Catholics is first and foremost Catholic. It may have a particular charism derived from its founding religious order or its history. That charism will rightly play an important part in shaping the school's particular identity. It must be remembered however that the charism is not the totality of the school's identity. Rather it is a lens through which the school's Catholicity should be seen. The charism must highlight in every way the school's Catholic identity, and not relegate it to a secondary place.

55. In the same way a school's focus on the saint of its name or founding religious congregation should not obscure the primacy of the relationship with Jesus Christ which it is the school's duty to foster. The young adult is first and foremost a disciple of Christ, and should not be described in the first instance as the follower of a particular saint or founder by the use of a generic name for the students. Inspiration may be taken from the life of a saint, but the focus must be on Christ

56. There has been little emphasis at the national level on Catholic character activities outside the religious education programme, the latter having attracted most of the energy and resources. Schools have largely been left to develop and manage these activities themselves. We consider that a mechanism or structure is needed to enable the clarification of objectives for these formative activities, the sharing of effective practice, and the provision of support.

A copy of the document can be downloaded here:

<http://www.catholic.org.nz/uploads/cknw/files/Catholic%20education%20of%20school-age%20children%20-%20electronic%20version%20ISBN%20978-0-473-27170-1.pdf>

We discussed these paragraphs in groups and then had some time to share our ideas and discuss as a big group. Here are some of the points we discussed. There are more questions than answers but it made us think about how we can build a more effective partnership between schools and parishes, which was the purpose of the workshop.

Lots of money is put into Catholic Schools. Why? What are we trying to do? Looking particularly at the above paragraphs Chris helped us to see that with this document we as youth ministers have an opportunity. Schools and Catholic Character Reviewers will all be considering this document - it is very important for schools. Some of the aspects that they are being encouraged to pick up on are the areas that we as youth ministers have expertise in. How can we help schools in this? We need to offer in a way that schools can use. Sometimes our relationship with schools is just trying to get the students to come to our events, but we need to look at how we can help schools include youth ministry in the school.

We talked briefly about the challenge of being fully Catholic in a school where all are supposedly Catholic.

If you want to offer to work in youth ministry in a school Chris had a couple of words of advice – first make sure you are mainstream Catholic. Secondly work with your Diocesan Youth Ministry Office – that way schools have somewhere to go to if they need to.

As in all youth ministry, relationship is critical. We need to build relationships with schools. An example would be to offer to help, not run, retreats to build relationships.

The schools are there to develop those who are Catholic, hoping it will rub off on others, rather than focussing on trying to evangelise the non-Catholics in the school. Some participants in the workshop raised the possibility of maybe streaming a retreat so that it can cater for the needs of different students.

Another question raised was who's going to pay for chaplains? Discussions will arise about this, no answer that covers all situations can be given.

In conclusion - make sure you are open to that partnership between schools and parishes!

Notes shared by Michelle Teahan