

BUILDING PEACE

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The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland

November 2001
Armagh

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MOST REV. SEÁN BRADY DCL
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH

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FOREWORD

The Catholic Church has articulated its view of the purpose of education as follows:

Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain to a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life. (Code of Canon Law, can. 795)

Catholic education involves more therefore than the transmission of information and skills. It seeks to lead young people into full maturity, an awareness of their deeper destiny and their role in building a better world. Our society in Northern Ireland has been characterised by profound conflict and those charged with the education of our young people have an important role to play in breaking down barriers of ignorance, misunderstanding and suspicion. Our schools cannot carry the full responsibility of reconciliation alone, however we recognise that they have an important role to play.

“Proclaiming the Mission” sought to examine the meaning and value of Catholic education, and the mission of the Church in the educative realm. This document reflects on how our Catholic schools can promote peace, understanding, healing and reconciliation.

I commend this document to teachers, parents, members of Boards of Governors, school trustees and all who are interested in Catholic education. This document is not the final word; it is a contribution to a continuing conversation on the work of peace and reconciliation that is so crucial for all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

MOST REV. SEÁN BRADY DCL
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH



1 | CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE

In a time of challenges and opportunities for the entire Northern Ireland Education Service, this paper considers how Catholic schools presently contribute, and how they can further assist peace and reconciliation. It is a practical paper with suggestions for improving the distinctive contribution of Catholic education.

The Catholic Church has addressed itself repeatedly to the importance of education in general and specifically to the role of the Catholic school.

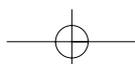
The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) in its Decree on Christian Education clearly embraced the belief that, through education, people “should be open to dialogue with others and willingly devote themselves to the promotion of the common good” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, Para 1). There is an explicit demand that each school “by providing friendly contacts between pupils of different characters and backgrounds ... encourages mutual understanding” (Para 5). Catholic schools “are no less zealous than other schools in the promotion of culture and in the human formation of young people. It is, however, the special function of the Catholic school to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel” (Para 8)¹.

The Congregation for Catholic Education in its document ‘The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium’ (1998) emphasises that the Catholic school is at the service of society and has a public role to play.

1. Flannery, A (ed), *Vatican Council II*, Volume 1, New York, Costello Publishing Company, 1988.

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The school can never be considered separately from other educational institutions and administered as an entity apart, but must always be related to the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole. For its part the Catholic school must be firmly resolved to take the new cultural situation in its stride. In this way its public role is clearly perceived. It fulfils a service of public usefulness and, although it takes its shape in the perspective of the Catholic faith, it is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all who appreciate and share its educational project. Catholic schools, like state schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the kind of education they wish for them.²

In the midst of the divisions in Northern Ireland the Bishops have constantly reiterated that tolerance is at the heart of all Christian and human education. Schools in the Catholic managed education sector have been and continue to be fully committed to building a new society.

Catholic educationalists and parents also welcome the recognition by central government that different types of schools, including Catholic schools, contribute in various ways to enriching educational experience and provision. A homogenous system is rarely the way forward. It is reassuring that the contribution of Catholic education is taken seriously and that it will be treated with parity of esteem. Evidence from across the world shows that Catholic schools are in enormous demand because of the quality of their formal and informal education. It is therefore a source of encouragement that central government explicitly commits itself to ensuring that parental choice will be a key factor in the provision of educational opportunities for young people.

Catholic schools clearly endorse the assertion in the 1998 Belfast Agreement that “an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society”.

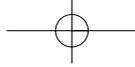
Our philosophy of education clearly meets and indeed enriches the key principles enunciated in the DENI document ‘Towards a Culture of Tolerance’ and the aims of education as stated by DENI in its current strategic plan⁴. These aims are to nurture:

- moral values and personal responsibility
- respect for diversity
- concern for other people
- positive and outward-looking attitudes

Catholic schools are confident that they are ideally placed to meet and go beyond the government’s strategic aims because of their vision and explicit commitment to facilitating individual growth in the context of a faith community. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has stated clearly that Catholic schools have a rich and unique educational vision and an explicit commitment to facilitating individual growth in the context of a faith community⁵. Catholic schools wish to make their own specific contribution to educating young people in a rounded and liberating way.

2. Congregation for Catholic Education (1998), *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, pp 44-45.

3. Northern Ireland Office (1998), *The Belfast Agreement of April 10th 1998*, Belfast, Paragraph 13.



2 | EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

In the context of Northern Ireland, Catholic schools have a special difficulty in implementing their vision. They have to contend not only with the internal problems which are common to all schools, but with the uniquely complex problems of the wider society to which they belong. The source of these problems is well known. They arise from the social and political history of the area which has led over generations to a totally unacceptable form of inherited apartheid between two communities. As a result, Catholic schools have become associated - although in varying degrees - with the nationalist community and its cultural expressions.

For this reason they have been considered by some to be an obstacle rather than a help to what we call the “peace process”.

We emphatically reject this contention as superficial, misleading and unjust. On the contrary, we see our schools as being ideally placed to assist our society to move beyond its deeply-ingrained divisions into a new coherence and openness to the world at large.

This conclusion is firmly based on two core values of Catholic Church teaching. The first of these is our theology of reconciliation and the second is our promotion of the common good.

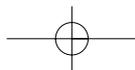
- (a) Catholics believe explicitly in a God who reconciles, and actively and endlessly draws people to himself, and in so doing, draws people to each other and into a loving community of faith. God is a God who heals and who enters into a personal relationship of love with all men and women; with the sole condition that they respond freely to his invitation. To believe in this God is by definition to promote reconciliation, especially where it is most urgently needed.

4. DENI (1996), *Strategic Plan for Education 1996-2000*, Bangor, pp 1-2.

5. CCMS (1998), *Life to the Full*, Belfast.

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To cultivate this quality of faith is to inspire self-esteem and well-founded self-confidence. It is to give young people a sense of their identity as children of a loving and forgiving God. This process begins at the level of the individual. Those who learn to be most convinced of their own identity and worth are best able to establish mutually-enriching relationships with others. The same is true of communities. By taking pride initially in their own school community, Catholic schools foster a healthy social awareness that will naturally want to reach out to the wider community.

(b) Catholics are also committed to social action and the promotion of the common good of society. Our religion is always personal, but never just a private affair. The Christian Gospel obliges us to help those in need who belong to our own community. However, it also obliges us to reach out to the wider society of which we are a part. Our task is to create a more just and caring social order. In particular, the Bishops see themselves as having a duty to apply the values of the Gospel to the problems of society. In this regard they are obliged to do their utmost to encourage members of the Church to do likewise in every area of life.

Schools are one such area, and it is one of primary and vital importance. Despite the decades of inter-community strife and conflict, the Bishops have constantly stressed the importance of cross-community work and Catholic schools in Northern Ireland have consistently been active in this area. Since its inception CCMS has continued to encourage and promote this openness. In 1995 it published 'Education for Mutual Understanding - A Vision'. Within the Religious Education programmes followed in primary and secondary schools the same concepts of partnership and openness are fundamental and key, and are explicitly integrated into the programmes.

This pursuit of the common good is an ongoing commitment. In practice it means the cultivation of a creative spirituality that energises all relationships⁶.

Catholic schools have always seen themselves as tapping into this life-giving source. The more they appreciate it the more they are empowered to play their part in building a more dynamic, coherent and outward-looking society.

6. There are many examples of such emphases, including:
Bolman, L G and Deal, T E (1995), *Leading with Soul*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass and
Senge, P (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*, London, Century Business.



3 | NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While it is manifestly unfair to expect schools to heal all the divisions in our society, they are nonetheless faced by the challenge to contribute as far as they can to:

- reconciling and cherishing diverse identities
- creating a climate of openness
- encouraging young people to play a full part in a just and equitable society

Reconciling and Cherishing Diverse Identities

It is important to realise that contact programmes, even if enjoyable, will do little on their own to break down stereotyping if there is a polite avoidance of controversial topics. However, in some Catholic schools and in other schools as well, good work is also being done in the curriculum, especially in the subjects of History, English, Drama and Religious Education to address issues of conflict and to overcome what Gallagher calls “the all-pervasive culture of silence that discourages open discussion on the causes and consequences of division”⁷.

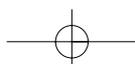
There is a need for central strategic leadership which ensures that the expectations and social responsibilities of Catholic schools are clear, that Religious Education programmes contain explicit education on other religious and social traditions and that, in consultation with fellow Christians, further common Religious Education units are developed.

A biennial conference to identify and analyse key issues and to present an Audit of Progress is recommended.

7. Gallagher, A M (1999), *Values and Education: A Discussion of Theory and Practice*, Unpublished Paper, p 14.

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Catholic schools are actively involved in a range of initiatives and local practices which seek to promote mutual respect, peace and reconciliation



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The presence of children from other denominations is seen as an enrichment of the education experience offered by the school

Each Catholic school should evaluate the effectiveness of all their EMU programmes and the EMU Co-ordinator should present a progress report at one meeting of the Board of Governors each year. Each school should also include time each year for Religious Development in its Inset planning. For the foreseeable future some of this time should be dedicated to clarifying the school's role and contribution to creative dialogue across divides. The resultant identified commitments should be clearly stated in the school's Mission Statement and Aims, and should lead to subject areas maximising their EMU content and pupils being helped to engage in constructive dialogue throughout their school career.

If a school finds that it is offering either curricular or contact programmes of special value, it should invite a DENI approved researcher to observe them, so that if judged useful, they may be made generally available.

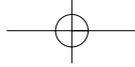
Social divisions can exist within as well as between denominational identities. In its report 'Raising Educational Standards' (1993)⁸, CCMS identified selection as an impediment to the raising of standards and the enhancement of life chances for all. It has subsequently called for a programme of research and a consideration of local solutions. Undoubtedly, the Northern Ireland Assembly will wish to give leadership on this issue.

Creating a Climate of Openness

Catholic schools exist to meet the wishes of parents who desire a Catholic education for their children. Over the years this desire has been proved by the financial sacrifices accepted by parents to provide a network of primary and post-primary schools serving every parish in Northern Ireland. For this reason priority of accommodation is given to children from the parish or parishes for whose benefit the school was provided and whose parents helped to meet the cost of provision. However, this does not exclude and should not be seen to exclude other children - particularly children of other denominations - whose parents accept the Mission Statement and Aims of the school. In principle, therefore, Catholic schools are open to children of all denominations. Indeed, the presence of children from other denominations is seen as an enrichment of the education experience offered by the school and as a practical expression to the commitment to inclusivity.

This policy of openness could lead to a more explicit articulation of the distinctive contribution and nature of Catholic schools and have a positive impact on pupil attitudes. The wider community would also benefit through increased diversity of choice.

8. CCMS (1993), *Raising Educational Standards*, Belfast.



It has been clearly stated in the paper on the philosophy and values of Catholic education that the Catholic tradition of the common good is inclusive, and that the promotion of this common good is intrinsic to Catholic faith - it is not an optional extra. The paper accepts that this vision of “reaching out” which characterises Catholic schools, without in any way compromising the ethos and aims of such schools, is essential in a pluralist society. It has particular importance for Northern Ireland and, indeed, for all societies experiencing division.

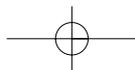
All schools should be welcoming and fair to pupils and staff from other traditions, and ensure that relationships with them reflect justice and promote self-esteem. Presently, a small number of Catholic schools draw a proportion of their pupils from both communities. In such cases they seek to develop arrangements to provide for the needs of pupils from other denominations. In addition, many other Catholic schools are actively involved in a range of initiatives and local practices which seek to promote mutual respect, peace and reconciliation. This is testimony to the fact that while retaining their commitment to a distinctive Catholic ethos, Catholic schools embody a spirit of outreach and reconciliation.

There are some practical conclusions to be drawn as a matter of urgency. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Catholic schools should seek to augment their investment in projects specifically designed to improve the spirit of community within schools, between schools, and within and between the communities in which schools are situated. Nor is it unreasonable to propose that since parishes are now free from the fund-raising burdens of the past in financing their schools that they should be open to contributing financially to these projects from which they stand to benefit themselves. In particular, we would like to see a more programmed expansion of catechetical work into this area of community outreach.

The aim of these programmes would be to create links of friendship across social and religious divides. They would include, for example, involving representatives from other schools and traditions in school assemblies.

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Encouraging Young People to Play a Full Part in a Just and Equitable Society

Various experiences have inhibited many Catholics from developing an emotional patriotism toward the Northern Ireland political unit. Against such a background and accounting for legitimate aspirations to a united Ireland, the promotion of a general acceptance of new agreed Northern Ireland institutions will not be easy. We have to break down traditional divisions and show that they are only limiting horizons.

We believe that Catholic schools can succeed in the task even though for some schools it will be particularly challenging. There will undoubtedly be instances where a school's efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in our society will present special difficulties, not in terms of the preparation and implementation of the programmes but in their ability to influence significantly or to change already established attitudes and values.

All who are involved in the education of young people acknowledge the significance for good or ill of the influence of the home and the neighbourhood. Attitudes and values are constantly being transmitted in the home and in the neighbourhood; sometimes intentionally, more often quite subconsciously.

Clearly, in implementing a programme of peace and reconciliation within a school there is at least the potential for conflict between the home, the school and the neighbourhood when there is no significant agreement about ultimate values. In a situation of potential conflict, the school has to handle the clarification of values sensitively if the young person is not to be further confused by seeing his or her identity threatened and loyalties challenged. In no aspect of the life of a school is that partnership between the home, the neighbourhood and the school more necessary than in the promotion of peace and reconciliation. Within a new political climate, schools could plan programmes in democracy and politics for all pupils which would contribute to changing present attitudes of confrontation.



5 | CONCLUSION

The purpose of Catholic education is to liberate pupils to realise their full potential and to awaken in them a sense of their dignity and worth. The school is at the heart of this project, but it fulfils its mission in partnership with the home and the parish. In this way the school seeks to empower both pupils and staff not only to contribute significantly to each other's development, but to contribute also to the life of the Church, the wider community and society as a whole. Moreover, schools do not work in isolation. They are inevitably influenced by prevailing cultures and interaction with a wide variety of agencies. This paper has sought both to identify the role of schools in society and to recognise that it is only in partnership that Northern Ireland will achieve the peace and reconciliation that its young people deserve.

Peace and reconciliation, to a large extent, depend on respect for cultural diversity in a climate that promotes openness and communication. This respect must be carefully cultivated and will only develop where those who want peace and reconciliation work together in harmony and with unity of purpose. The recent publication of the working party report on Integrating Education 'Towards a Culture of Tolerance' has done much to develop such unity of purpose with its forthright assertion that:

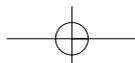
It is a seminal purpose of the Northern Ireland Education Service to promote a culture of tolerance and reconciliation.

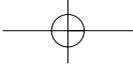
The report also recognises that the diverse schools and agencies, in contributing to this goal, will do so in keeping with the particular ethos and circumstances within which they operate. In recognition of this the Bishops intend to enter into discussions with the various education bodies and other agencies to form precise and practical recommendations on the three objectives of this paper, namely -

- to reconcile and cherish diverse identities
- to create a climate of openness
- to encourage young people to play a full part in a just and equitable society.

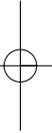
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