

4. ETHOS AND PASTORAL CARE

The purpose and nature of the Catholic school

The purpose of the Catholic School is to provide a good all-round education in the spirit of the gospel of Jesus, aspiring in particular to live out its central message and challenge: to worship the God who loves us, to love and help our fellow human beings, and to learn to exercise responsibility for the world around us.

Founded on that teaching, the school maintains a Catholic ethos – that is, a set of lived values and attitudes – which influences all aspects of the school's life. These include activities in and beyond the classroom, relationships among staff members, parents and learners, and disciplinary procedures. An indispensable aspect of Catholic ethos is a strong and vibrant Religious Education programme, drawn up in accordance with *Fostering Hope*, the policy of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. The ethos entails therefore a development of the spiritual capacity for faith, hope and love. It also requires the upholding of the dignity of the human person, of all beings, and of all creation, with a special concern for the poor and the marginalised. Outreach to others, pastoral care for all, and celebration of the school's religious character are of the essence of this ethos.

The school is committed to preparing learners to take their place in society as responsible, honest and compassionate citizens. While classroom teaching is compliant with the objectives of the National Curriculum, the search for excellence and depth in teaching and learning is shaped by a Catholic vision of life. This means that all curriculum areas are integrated in a meaningful way and infused with this particular vision. The school is staffed by qualified, competent personnel who give witness to the school's values and help to foster its special ethos.

The school strives to be relevant to and welcoming of all persons, irrespective of gender, race, culture or religion. It welcomes teachers, parents and learners who may not be Catholic but who respect the Catholic ethos and seek its values. Respect is accorded to the faith of all members of the school community, to their different religious identities, backgrounds and traditions. Openness and dialogue are encouraged and practised as a means of intellectual, moral and spiritual development.

The school works in cooperation with parents, the local church, the wider community and the institutions of civil society. Where the Catholic school is a public school, the Governing Body includes the principal, and parents (who constitute the majority), representatives of the school owner (a religious congregation or a bishop), of the school's staff and of learners from Grade 8 and above. Section 57 of the South African Schools Act protects the right of such owners to ensure that the religious character of the school is maintained. In the case of an independent school the Act makes no reference to a religious character nor to the composition of a Board or Governing Body. The school authorities are free to make their own decisions on these matters.



Catholic Schools and Pastoral Care

Catholic schools are founded on the person of Jesus Christ and embrace the example of Jesus and the teaching of the Gospel, especially in relation to faith, hope, love, forgiveness, justice and freedom. Catholic schools reflect the love of God within their communities. Catholic schools therefore have to critically examine:

- the practical expression of the Gospel message within their communities
- their care for those within the school community, especially those who are vulnerable
- the extent to which learners experience school as a place of hope for their future.



While pastoral care has always been a focus for Catholic schools, there is an urgency today to meet new challenges and responsibilities. Rapid and complex social change, the impact of HIV/AIDS and the growing numbers of orphans demand a response from the school. There is substantial uncertainty, insecurity and stress in families, increased levels of violence in the community at large as well as among learners in our schools. The way in which each Catholic school responds to these challenges requires regular appraisal. Many of the quality indicators contained in this manual will assist schools to appraise this important dimension of the school.

Pastoral care involves every member of the school community. A central feature of pastoral care is the commitment to partnership and shared responsibility among staff, learners, parents and other family members and the wider community.

There are many resources within the wider community which can support pastoral care in schools, including:

- church groups,
- health, safety, welfare services,
- and hospice care.

It is important that schools identify all possible support services, and that strong links are established with all the agencies that are able to support learners in who need support.

Dimensions of pastoral care

The following dimensions and features of pastoral care are already present in many Catholic schools and need to be regularly appraised:

Environment

Catholic schools implement policies that ensure children's safety and protection. They promote healthy and safe environments which foster the children's emotional and physical wellbeing. The manner in which people interact with each other on a daily basis affects each person's sense of self-worth, belonging and well-being

Quality of Relationships

Teachers set the tone and priority of pastoral care by their example. Teachers are known as caring, compassionate adults who take a real interest in the lives of their learners and who set appropriate boundaries within those teacher-learner relationships.

The fostering of high-quality interpersonal relationships among teachers, learners, parents and other staff is a responsibility shared by everyone. Learners recognise their own potential for building acceptance, trust, esteem and friendship among their peers, and to clearly understand the role of their teachers.

Quality of teaching

Teachers plan their lessons with learners' needs in mind. They create challenging learning environments and pace their lessons appropriately. Questions are used to stimulate discussion and to develop the learners' ability to think critically.

Self-discipline and responsibility

Discipline policies, school rules and sanctions are intended to promote the good order of the community, and as such they are positive concepts. They should be aids to the fostering of self-discipline and responsibility.

Pastoral care in Catholic schools fosters the learners' self-discipline. It aims to develop people who are responsible and inner-directed, and capable of choosing freely in accordance with their conscience. Pastoral care should help learners to recognise that their fundamental freedoms and rights are reciprocated by responsibilities.

Pastoral Programmes

Pastoral programmes represent a planned means of helping learners to value themselves and to experience well-being. They should include programmes for self-esteem, social relationships, moral development, vocational awareness, sexuality, health and personal safety. Substance abuse awareness and programmes dealing with grief and loss should also be included.



The ethos of a Catholic school and its expression in Pastoral care is rooted in the pleas of Jesus, *Love one another as I have loved you* (John 15:12) and grounded in his message *I have come that you may have life and have it to the full* (John 10:10).

The fullness of life in Christ speaks of what is meant for everyone. Pastoral care ensures that the fullness is fostered and nurtured in the school for the entire school community by recognizing the dignity and worth of each individual, treating them with respect and working towards the well-being of all.



Comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

This pamphlet is part of a series on aspects of Catholic education for teachers, parents and board members, produced by the Ethos Committee of the Catholic Schools Board of the Archdioceses of Pretoria and Johannesburg



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