

Report on Religious Education in Catholic Schools released by ACU

Australian Catholic University's (ACU's) La Salle Academy has published *Ways Forward in Religious Education, La Salle Publications (No.3)*, a comprehensive report on Religious Education (RE) in Catholic schools across Australia.

Summarising the perspectives of 57 leading Catholic education scholars and practitioners from around Australia, the report confirmed the need for RE to remain grounded in the tradition of the Catholic Church while being responsive and relevant for all students.

It reinforced the significance of teachers who are formed in faith and able to engage pedagogy which facilitates equitable inclusion through experiential and inquiry-based processes.

The report emerged from a dynamic and innovative process which modelled RE as a dialogical experience. The outcomes of the professional sharing and deliberations situated RE at the forefront of curriculum endeavours integral to Catholic school identity and mission.

The introduction to the colloquium by Dean of La Salle Academy Professor Br David Hall FMS set the scene. "While much has been achieved in Religious Education over many decades, we find ourselves unsettled about our current predicament," said Professor Hall.

"We are not sure if what we are doing is really hitting the mark. The Colloquium brings together parents, academics, Catholic Education personnel, Campus Ministry, and leaders of Religious Institutes who all bring 'a piece of the wisdom.' The challenge is one of dialogue, respectful listening, networking and learning about advancing ways forward in Religious Education."

The report identified five interdependent characteristics integral to RE in Catholic schools - formation, pedagogy, curriculum, research, and partnerships. These characteristics were underpinned by the catechist manual, *Foundations in Faith*, and advanced by key principles within a culture of being authentic and strategic.

Suggested strategies for employers in Catholic education included: 'Formation' - confirming forums for networking and integrating faith experience, 'Pedagogy' - promoting RE method and teacher roles of Moderator, Specialist, Witness; 'Curriculum' - engaging staff, students and school-based leaders of RE at future colloquiums; 'Partnerships' - strengthening communication and engaging mission partners beyond schools; and, 'Research' - gathering and applying quality data to provide for continuing improvement.

Commenting on the findings in the report Professor Hall said, "For some authorities and participants, the 'fruits' of the colloquium expanded horizons, while for others, emerging and familiar pathways were validated."

Associate author Associate Professor Bill Sultmann added that the report, "Will ideally have a significant bearing on teaching and strategy in Religious Education."

"Moreover, it confirmed the value of partnerships in fostering life-giving pathways in Religious Education. While there is much to do, there is also incredible innovation and insightful intention that offers much encouragement and hope."

Ways Forward in Religious Education (No.3) is available in hard copy (\$5 for booklet) and a no cost digital form from the La Salle Academy:

http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/our_university/catholic_identity/la_salle_academy

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