



## **A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education**

### **Official Launch – Formal Address**

It is both a real privilege and a special honour for me to be able to address you all this evening as we gather to officially launch this wonderful booklet: *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*. Those of you who have had the chance to leaf through the booklet already will I am sure agree with me when I say that it is both beautifully presented and, though relatively short and easy to read, very rich in content.

In this short address, rather than take you step by step through the document, I thought it would be helpful to provide some context. In doing so I want to acknowledge Bishop Greg O’Kelly, who during his time as Chair of the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education, kept calling the National Catholic Education Commission back to one of its most fundamental principles: namely that unless Catholic Education, and educators in Catholic schools, understood the foundations upon which the whole edifice of Catholic Education was built, then there was a very real risk that Catholic Education would lose its way and, slowly but surely, lose its right to a place in the educational landscape of our nation. As I indicated in the foreword which I wrote for the booklet we are launching this evening, if we were to leave God out of the work of Catholic education we would be *“selling our children and young people short and leaving them with a limited and distorted understanding of what it means to be a human person living his or her life to the full”*.

This statement, which falls so easily from the lips, is in fact an expression of something which underpins not only the booklet we are launching this evening, but the whole structure of Christian faith. In our booklet it is captured in the section headed “A Vision”, which also has a sub-heading taken from John’s Gospel, where we find the following words placed on the lips of Jesus: *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10). Life lived to the full – in every sense. This seems to me to be a very good way of expressing what we, the Church, are trying to do through our involvement in the education of the young. We want to be a part of that endeavour which equips children and young people to live their lives as fully, as richly, as imaginatively – we might say “as humanly” – as they possibly can. Many of you here this evening, unlike me, are parents. I imagine that you would feel very much at home with this aim. Who would not want this for their children? Who would want them to be anything less than they can potentially be? Who would want them not to get the most out of their lives? Who would want them to be deprived of anything that could help them to be all that they can be? And if it is true that this is what parents want for their children, we hope and expect that it is also true of

those who choose to embrace the career, or better the vocation, of a teacher or of a staff member in a school.

But then, of course, the questions begin to emerge. What are those things which will truly equip young people to live their lives to the full? What sort of environment will facilitate this kind of development in the young? What is it that makes for a truly human life of happiness, integrity and fulfilment? Here we are entering into the realm of what I would call a “world view”. In asking these kinds of questions we are really asking about our understanding of how the world works and how human beings work. We are asking about what will bring happiness and, conversely, what will compromise or even destroy it. We are asking about how a person can move forward confidently and positively as each day unfolds; about what we can rely on and what we need to be careful of; about how we can learn to make life-giving choices rather than life-limiting choices. And when it comes to education we are asking these questions on behalf of our children, and with their best interests at heart.

This is where the words recorded in John’s gospel and quoted in our Framework come into play. Jesus insists that he has come so that we can have life and have it to the full. On another occasion, also recorded in John’s gospel, he boldly says of himself, “*I am the Way; I am the Truth; I am the Life*” (Jn 14:6).

I do not think I can put it any more starkly than this: the Church is involved in the education of the young because the Church takes Jesus at his word. We, as parents, as good citizens of our society, as members of a faith community, want our children and our young people to be as well prepared as possible to find **a sure way** through the challenges which life will throw up at them: and we take Jesus at his word when he says “**I am the Way**”. We want our children and our young people to be able to build their lives on solid foundations – on what is **true and lasting** rather than on what is merely attractive on the surface but possibly empty within – and we take Jesus at his word when he says “**I am the Truth**”. We want our children and our young people to know the joy of **a life lived with dignity**, with integrity, with compassion and with love – and we take Jesus at his word when he says “**I am the Life**”. If Jesus is right – if Jesus can be trusted – why would we not want an education for our children which is grounded on his teachings, on his extraordinary example and, even more foundationally and remarkably, on his promise to continue to be with us, now, in the present, as a source of strength through the life and ministry of the Church?

This fundamental belief, this fundamental way of understanding what the world is all about and what we are all about, is the context for Catholic Education, and, because of that, the immediate context of the Framework we are launching this evening. Catholic schools exist so that there can be places where the whole effort of education is conducted in, permeated by, shot through with that understanding of the world which places God at the heart of everything. This God is the one who has been revealed, unveiled for us, through the life, the words, the ministry, the teaching, the example, of Jesus. And this Jesus, who is God among us as one of us, is the one who through the gift of the Holy Spirit brought the Church into being as the privileged place where the mystery of God can be encountered and embraced, assimilated and shared with others. And the Catholic school, each individual Catholic school, your Catholic school, as an

expression of the Church, must be and become more and more the place where, not just in religion class but as an environment, a community of persons, a culture, the presence of God, made known to us in Christ alive in the Church, is acknowledged, honoured, celebrated, and embraced as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is really only in light of this context that the full import of the Framework we are launching this evening will be seen and understood. If our schools are to be all that we hope they will be, and all that we need them to be, then those who lead our school communities, and all our teachers and support staff, are faced with a great challenge. As leaders we must be ready to ask ourselves these questions: How ready am I and my staff to enter into and take our rightful place in this faith environment? How confident am I that I and my staff can meet the expectations of the parents who entrust their children to this educating faith community? How well equipped am I and my staff to support children and young people in their often hesitant, often questioning, even sometimes rebellious journey of faith and life? How open am I, together with my staff, to engaging actively in my own formation in faith?

These are for some, and perhaps for many, confronting or uncomfortable questions. They are, however, questions with which those who would genuinely and generously seek to contribute to the well-being and integrity of Catholic education will be willing to engage. As Pope Francis would put it, *“Catholic educators need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirit to others so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love”*.

It is this “formation of the heart” which this new *Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* seeks to facilitate. We launch the Framework this evening, but this is only the beginning: it must become a living document which challenges, stimulates, provokes, unsettles, confirms and reinvigorates people’s faith, their commitment and their hope. Those who have worked so hard and so long to bring this project to this stage, especially Mr John McGrath, Sr Liz Dodds, and their team of colleagues and collaborators, including Gavin Abraham and the team at the NCEC Office, deserve our admiration and our gratitude. On your behalf I offer them all now a very heart-felt “thank-you” for all the blood, sweat and tears, and I hope the smiles, the laughter and the sense of quiet joy, which they have experienced along the way. In reminding us all that the very best way we can thank them is to make sure that this Framework gets into every one of our schools and into the hearts and minds of every one of our school leaders, teachers and support staff, I have great pleasure in formally launching this long-awaited *Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*.

Thank You.

+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB

Chair, Bishops Commission for Catholic Education  
Archbishop of Perth