



Leading Formation for Mission

A Practical Guide



FORMATION: WORK OF THE SPIRIT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are inextricably connected to Country through its land, waters and songlines. This connection to Country and all of God's creation reveals our spirituality as people with a home we have looked after with special regard for millennia. This connection is spiritual - the land is a sacred space, a gift from God and from the ancestors.

The Spirit of God is in our very being; an intrinsic part of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and spoken of in the languages that tell our stories. It provides wisdom that strengthens identity and gives an opportunity to engage with and share a profound understanding across communities. Walking together, engaging in formation programs, we can draw on the wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to invite participants to explore their relationships with the Spirit.

Just as there are many ways to express individual personhood, there are different ways to come to know God and be with God. Transformation occurs when we engage with the person and their story; when we hear and feel the Spirit in others; when we allow the Spirit to move among us - formation is the work of the Spirit. "The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge" (Francis, 2015, n. 80).

Written on behalf of the National Catholic Education Commission Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Network Group by Helen Christensen, Sharon Cooke and Antoinette Cole.

Artwork: 'The day the Holy Spirit visited Majorie and her people' by Aboriginal Elder of the Tiwi Islands, Marjorie Liddy.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The Parable of the Sower frames the key principles underpinning formation and so guides the ways formation for mission is understood, programmed, presented and monitored in Catholic education and other ministries.

He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

(Mark 4:2-9)



REFLECTION

Here Jesus challenges his listeners to consider the impact of our words and actions on those around us – the ways that our intentional and unintentional actions can influence those who see, watch and hear our words or engage with our programs. Indeed, we would all like our formation efforts to yield thirty, sixty or a hundredfold, yet we know that some seeds fall among weeds, on rocky ground or on the path. What must we do to prepare the soil for greater impact?

One could also look at the parable a little differently and ask who has sown the seeds within us or nurtured the seeds which have borne fruit? We are all graced and gifted, the products of the love and support of parents, friends, community members and mentors. This understanding of the potential within all people is critical for effective formation – formation is not simply teaching people about faith and mission – instead it brings full life to the seed already buried deep within.



FOREWORD

I welcome this valuable material, *Leading Formation for Mission: A Practical Guide*, published by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) and commend this guide to all engaged in the educational, catechetical and evangelisation ministries of the Church.

The NCEC's publication, *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education (2017)*, has facilitated a shared understanding of the purpose and nature of formation for mission in Catholic Education. This guide complements, at a practical level, understandings specific to formation leaders.

Formation invites people to use their gifts to further God's mission for a particular time, place, and purpose. Recognising that everyone is on a faith journey, formation engages people in discerning their place in the call to bring Gospel values to the service of others.

The themes of vocation and mission are the call to Christ's faithful which reminds us to identify the invitation to serve a God who is with us and for us. Our formation is at the heart of our response. Formation does not follow neat formulae or strategic plans. It is:

...Christ centred. It is an intentional, ongoing, and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world. (NCEC, 2017, p. 9)

As we step forward into the next 200 years of Catholic education, I invite all of those involved to embrace formation for mission.

'It is essential that leaders and staff understand and are solidly committed to the Catholic identity of the school'. (ACBC 2021, *200 Years Young: A pastoral letter from the Bishops of Australia to the leaders, staff, students, and families of Catholic education in Australia.*)

I thank all involved in the preparation of this important guide with appreciation to the NCEC Faith Formation & Religious Education Standing Committee for their leadership and oversight of the project.

May all be rewarded for their efforts by seeing our ministries within and beyond schools increasingly become places inspired by the movement of the Spirit.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Anthony Fisher OP
Chair, Bishops Commission for Catholic Education

INTRODUCTION

Leading Formation for Mission: A Practical Guide ('A Formator's Guide') is a resource for educational leaders with responsibility for formation for mission in Catholic education. It is a companion publication to *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* ('The Framework') (NCEC, 2017) and complements formation practice across Archdiocesan/Diocesan, Religious Institutes and other Canonical entities.

“Formation for mission is a process that is systematic, collaborative, graduated and ongoing. This process holds itself within relationships built on accompaniment centred on the self, others, creation and God.”

(NCEC, 2017, p. 14)

A Formator's Guide has been developed in a culture of dialogue within the mission of Catholic education. Its purpose is to assist leaders in their consideration, development and evaluation of current practice and inform the strategic enhancement of formation in Catholic schools, agencies and other settings. Such formation programs operate in partnership with and in support of families and parishes in advancing faith in life.

The Parable of the Sower, woven throughout the fabric of the guide, offers a rich analogy for the work of mission leaders in the contemporary Australian Catholic educational landscape. “While fully supporting existing leaders and staff in our Catholic schools, we identify and form a new generation of leaders and teachers who are deeply committed to the goals of Catholic education” (ACT-NSW Bishops, 2007, p. 18).

Formation is “an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” in the framework (NCEC, 2017, p. 9).

This practical guide is a resource for planning effective formation through attentiveness to five pillars.

The pillars are:

- Foundations in Faith
- Hospitality for all people
- Relevant, engaging and effective
- Facilitating personal transformation
- Encouraging witness

The indicators of formation program effectiveness are:

- Experiencing and being transformed by the Sacred
- Nurturing good relationships
- Cultivating missionary discipleship

Integral to the resource you will find:

- key pillars which underpin formation for mission
- ideas to support formation practice
- images to stimulate minds and hearts
- Scripture to inspire and connect with God
- accessible language
- further resources.



FORMATION PILLARS

A Framework for Formation for Mission establishes a definition of formation which aligns practical expression in formation pillars which shape and guide preparation, practice and indicators of effectiveness.

Faith formation of Catholic school community members is Christ centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world. *(NCEC, p. 9).*





FOUNDATIONS IN FAITH

The first pillar of the Framework, **Foundations in Faith**, establishes that Catholic formation for mission is explicitly Christological, scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded. Individual differences in faith and service are recognised and formation of the heart is characterised by prayerfulness, reflection, and sacramental life. Formation in this light engages and celebrates personal story in the everyday realities of life (family, professional and community), and focuses on a faith journey in which discipleship is in response to a living tradition.

Formation is central to the life and mission of Catholic schools. The school's task is fundamentally “a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life”.

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 37).

Considerations for formation program development

Foundations in Faith are the expression of the Gospel and Church tradition within the mission, life and culture of Catholic education.

Formation programs which are centred on **Foundations in Faith**:

- are inspired by Scripture and Tradition (Theological)
- encourage a personal relationship with Jesus and are centred upon him (Christological)
- discern the presence and action of the Spirit in people's lives (Pneumatological)
- are attentive to the mission of God in a graced world (Missional)
- foster understandings of and attachment to the Church (Ecclesial)
- encourage active participation in the worship life of the Church (Sacramental)
- enable collaboration with other people of faith (Ecumenical/Interfaith).



FOR REFLECTION

He began to teach them many things in parables and in his teaching he said to them: Listen!

(Mark 4:2-3)

Formation for mission has its roots firmly planted in Church tradition, Scripture and the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught in parables which challenged and unsettled the listeners of his time.

How do today's formators engage participants in stories which speak to their experiences in a changing and graced world?



HOSPITALITY FOR ALL PEOPLE

The pillar of **Hospitality For All People** in formation is founded on the dignity of each person and provides for respectful engagement through welcome and hospitality. The wisdom of the Framework is that it is simultaneously invitational and potentially transformative, offering inclusivity and wholeness to the formation experience for all. In this way, formation is for mission (it advances mission understanding and engagement); formation is in mission (it utilises processes that draw from the richness of the tradition) and formation serves mission (empowers mission service and witness within and beyond the formation experience).

The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. This is the disposition of a Church that desires inclusiveness, a place where no one defines the boundaries of God's mercy and where the people of God are the primary source of a missionary impulse.

(Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 119)

Considerations for formation program development

Hospitality For All People in formation programs:

- promotes an understanding of human dignity and the common good
- is respectful of personal, social and cultural diversity
- supports communal Catholic culture and a shared purpose for mission
- is responsive to participant readiness and priorities
- is personally, relationally, professionally and communally responsive.



FOR REFLECTION

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell... (Mark 4:3-4)

Many different people gather to participate in formation events and experiences. The seeds fall into hearts and minds of varied openness and preparation.

How do formators recognise participant readiness and motivation to engage with the experience?



RELEVANT, ENGAGING & REFLECTIVE

The pillar of **Relevant, Engaging & Reflective** in formation is evidenced in the integration of goals, practices and dialogue grounded in effective adult learning. Scripture, Church tradition, applied research and the experience of Catholic education identify relevant, engaging, timely and effective programs as critical to formation for mission.

Schools can and must be a catalyst... a place of encounter and convergence of the entire educating community, with the sole objective of training and helping to develop mature people who are simple, competent and honest, who know how to love with fidelity, who can live life as a response to God's call, and their future profession as a service to society.

(Francis, 2013a)

Considerations for formation program development

Relevant, Engaging & Reflective practice within formation:

- is aligned to the mission and identity of Catholic education
- is strategic, developmental, sequential and ongoing
- is imaginative, creative and honours adult learning principles
- engages the 'heart' and is characterised by reflection and prayerfulness
- engages the 'intellect' and is nurtured by appropriate theological content
- engages the 'Spirit' and is characterised by contemplation and action for mission.



FOR REFLECTION

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path... other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain. (Mark 4:4 & 8)

The parable invites us to consider the way formation is delivered: the dynamism and relevance of the presenters and the activities. The parable also reminds us that some programs meet the 'path' – a place of closed minds, preconceived ideas and unquestioned values and attitudes. Creative presenters seek to encourage and engage staff with God's mission.



FACILITATING PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

The pillar of **Facilitating Personal Transformation** acknowledges the interaction of the formation experience with the capabilities and aspirations of the formation participant. It invites participants to encounter the Word of God* and recognise that they are called to be the face of God for others and the world in personal, relational, professional and communal fields of engagement. It is to be called to the mind, heart and action of Christ in the world.

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 spirits to others, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love.

(NCEC, 2017, p.14)

Considerations for formation program development

Facilitating Personal Transformation through formation is supported by practices that nurture:

- growth in spiritual awareness
- growth in theological understanding
- growth in connection to God’s mission in the Catholic school and the wider community
- vocational commitment and capabilities for mission
- service in the Catholic Church and for the world.



FOR REFLECTION

Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold... (Mark 4:8)

“The challenge is up to the seed. All the warmth and water in the world won’t create another plant unless the seed’s husk is broken and shed... the inner home of humans is a lot like the heart of a seed. Like seeds, we have great potential for receiving the word of God, for becoming who we are meant to be” (Rupp, 1985, p. 70).

How are formation programs developed to enable participants to be open to the work of the Spirit?

*Word of God can refer to Scriptural texts and the Person of Jesus.



ENCOURAGING WITNESS

The pillar of **Encouraging Witness** is found in responding to the Spirit and intentions of Christian Baptism and in sharing the person and message of Christ to others in teaching, service, community, and liturgy. We are "... called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" (Francis, 2018, n. 14).

The human face, the yes, the smile, the look and the glance are invitations and expressions of the Spirit. A tone, a word, a phrase and a sentence, are also powerful indicators and means for exchange in the spiritual life. Physical handshakes, helpful hands and caring hands are all means of experiencing one's support, which reflects the revelation of God.

(Westley, 1996, p. 11)

Considerations for formation program development

Formation programs which **Encourage Witness** are:

- respectful of individuals and their faith traditions
- encouraging of participants' personal witness
- reflective of participants' everyday reality
- supportive of Catholic education traditions
- in service of the community of faith and learning
- service and justice oriented
- experiential
- relevant to context and culture.



FOR REFLECTION

... growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. (Mark 4:8)

"If the seed has been sowed in us for years, then sooner or later we must become the sower and go out into the world, the other fields, and sow there what has been sown in us. After the resurrection Jesus' first words to his disciples when he breaks into their locked room are 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me so I send you'. We are the adult children of God, called to become not just seeds for the bread, but seed for the sowing and the sower. This is the job, the mission and vocation that has been entrusted to all of us by the resurrection" (McKenna, 1994, p. 42).

How do the experiences of the formation program empower people to sow the seed?

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ENCOUNTER

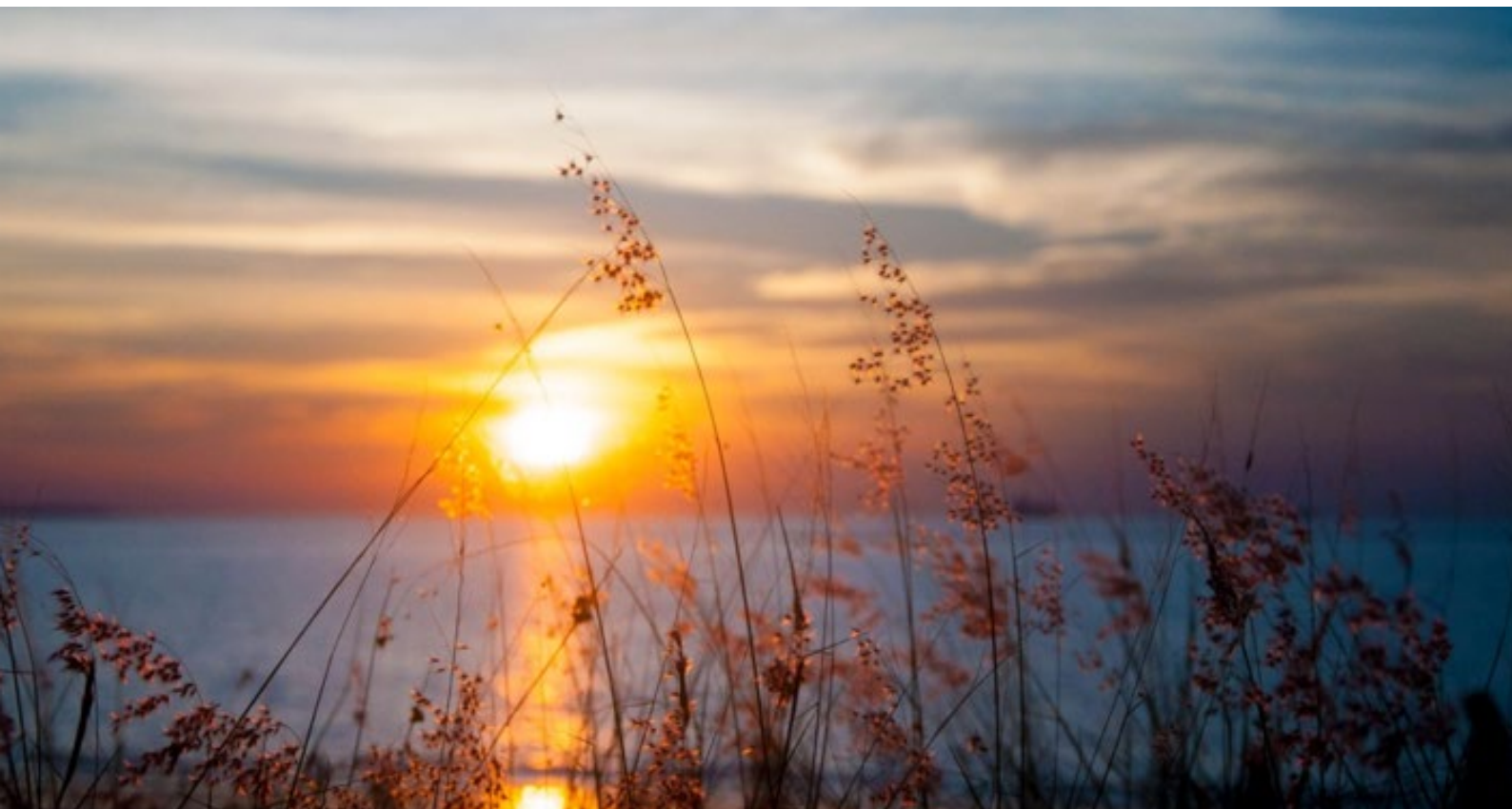
The process of formation provides opportunities which invite engagement with God and are evidenced in the gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Integral to engagement is a deepening relationship with the Sacred, experiencing better relationships and engaging in missionary discipleship, through dialogue and formal and informal accompaniment.

An invitation to work for the ‘culture of encounter’, in a simple way, ‘as Jesus did’: not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them’...

(Francis, 2016)

Within a culture of encounter, formation programs seek to provide experiences that invite participants to:

- experience and be transformed by the Sacred
- nurture good relationships
- cultivate missionary discipleship.





EXPERIENCING & BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE SACRED

Experiencing & Being Transformed By The Sacred is becoming conscious of the presence and abundance of God in all creation. This can be found in stillness, prayer, Scripture, meditation, liturgy, sacrament, creative arts, connection to other people and the earth, and in experiences which call participants beyond themselves to mission through justice, love and peace.

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 37).

Indicators of formation program effectiveness

The effectiveness of **Experiencing & Being Transformed By The Sacred** is evidenced in a deepening of a participant's personal and communal understanding, integration and action in connection with:

- God
- The person of Jesus Christ
- the Spirit of God in creation
- the Spirit of God within Scripture, Tradition and Liturgy
- the Spirit of God in the Church and beyond
- the Spirit of God in other traditions and spiritualities.



FOR REFLECTION

Let anyone with ears to hear listen! (Mark 4:9)

"The parables are earthquakes shaking the ground from under our presuppositions and prepackaged values in order that a few cracks in the sidewalk might appear, enabling some of the seed to fall in between the cracks and produce at least a few weeds. The upsetting of our preconceived ideas is not a disaster; it is a necessity in order to hear the word of God' (Keating, 2019. p. 65).

How do the parables call us to encounters with God in the ordinary and extraordinary everyday of our lives?



NURTURING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Formation programs **Nurture Good Relationships** as the experience of the Spirit in self and others and develop personal and communal understanding, shared wisdom and collegial action in God's mission.

Faith is a relationship, an encounter, and under the impetus of God's love we can communicate, welcome, and understand the gifts of others and respond to them.

(Francis, 2019)

Indicators of formation program effectiveness

The effectiveness of **Nurturing Good Relationships** is evidenced in a deepening of personal and communal understanding, integration and action through invitation to:

- encounters with God
- deeper sharing of beliefs
- welcome and hospitality
- 'walking with' others (accompaniment)
- dialogue and sharing
- collaborative expression of mission
- partnership and connection
- personal wellbeing.



REFLECTION

... some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly... when the sun rose, it was scorched; since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it... Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain... (Mark 4:4-8)

Wherever the seed fell in this parable it encountered other things – birds, thorns, sunshine and good soil. The parable affirms that whatever our circumstances, we are in relationship. The field of wheat is a communal endeavour, indeed there would not be a great harvest with a single stalk of wheat.

How do our relationships and encounters which are graced blessings from God, bring us life, love and hope?





CULTIVATING MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Cultivating Missionary Discipleship is entering into a deeper relationship with Christ and responding to the invitation of Christ to share the joy of the Gospel with others. It is being open to the work of the Spirit within the context of one's family, responsibilities, relationships, and community. Within the Catholic school it reaches into Religious Education, the wider curriculum, the religious dimension of the school, processes, structures, culture and community.

My mission of being in the heart of people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing.

(Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 273)

Indicators of formation program effectiveness

The effectiveness of the invitation to **Cultivate Missionary Discipleship** is evidenced in formation programs which focus on participants' deepening personal and communal understanding, integration and action in connection with their engagement in:

- Catholic education as part of the mission of God
- the service of Christ in others
- the call to witness to the person of Christ
- service and communion as a Baptismal invitation
- worship and celebration
- education as vocation.



FOR REFLECTION

Listen! (Mark 4:3)

“One of the most hopeful parts of this parable is to note that there is a new crop, a new time to sow every year. Every year we start again. Every year the seed is sown again in our hearts” (McKenna. 1994, p 39-40).

How do formation programs continue to sow the seeds within the ever-changing contexts of school communities?

FORMATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Preparing the soil

Formation takes many forms within unique contexts and communities. This checklist is for those preparing formal formation programs, who are invited to consider the 'soil' into which the teachings, ideas, discussions and reflections are to be sown. Effective, engaging and relevant formation is well planned and prepared, ensuring the best conditions for the message to take root and thrive.

Preparing the soil

Checklist - questions to ask

Reviewing Community Context

Who are the participants?

- What formation programs have been undertaken by the group?
- What are the needs of this group: age, experience, roles, cultural influences?
- What is the charism of the school or ministry?
- Have there been recent events that are important to consider?
- Has there been staff turnover, new leadership or other significant change?
- Have clergy or religious associated with the ministry been invited to participate?

Establishing Content

What should be included?

- Are the content and intentions clearly communicated?
- What Scripture supports and challenges the chosen theme/topic?
- Is the content theologically informed?
- Is Christ at the centre of the presentation?
- Are there ethical issues to be considered?
- Does this program meet people where they are at?
- Is there a link to mission?
- Does the content honour inclusivity?
- Has enough work been done to prepare the soil to connect and work with your local Aboriginal community?

Presentation Options

What would work best for this group?

- Is there opportunity for prayer, liturgy or Sacrament in the program?
- Is there a balance between input and reflection, stillness and movement?
- Is there an opportunity for small and larger group discussion?
- Are there appropriate media resources which support presentations?
- Can creative elements enhance the presentation – art, music, drama?
- Have adult learning principles been honoured – relevance, self-direction, life experience, clear goals, practical application and collegiality?
- Is there opportunity for multi-modal presentation?
- Have the speakers been briefed on the context?

Preparing the soil

Checklist - questions to ask

Resources

What resources would enrich this presentation?

- Are there key readings for this experience?
- Has a booklet or handout been prepared?
- Where do film, video, music, art and literature fit in this experience?
- Do presentations reflect relevant and contemporary understandings of Theology, Christology and Scripture?
- Can Church teachings be included in the resources provided?
- Are there images or prayer focus materials which would enhance the presentation?
- Is the appropriate technology in place and operational?

Hospitality

How are participants made to feel welcome and comfortable in the experience?

- Has a personal invitation been sent?
- Are the traditional Indigenous owners acknowledged at the commencement of the experience?
- Is the venue suitable for the program theme and focus?
- Is the venue off-site?
- Is there someone to welcome participants?
- Does time need to be set aside to meet people?
- Is ample hospitality provided?
- Are presenters welcomed and introduced?
- Has someone been asked to give a vote of thanks?

Evaluation

How will you know if the formation was engaging, relevant and effective for the individuals and group?

- Are formal evaluation options included in the resource pack?
- Do participants have additional avenues for responding to the program, content and experience?
- Is there follow-up required?
- How does this program or experience fit with ongoing organisational practice?

CONCLUSION

With its genesis in *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*, the pages of this guide provide pillars for consideration in planning and facilitating quality formation programs, with a clear focus on the individual needs and indicators of effectiveness for participants.

The Parable of the Sower, woven throughout the fabric of the guide, offers a rich analogy for the work of Mission Leaders in the contemporary Australian Catholic educational landscape.

The work of the sower today is undertaken in a range of different cultures and contexts. We are called to, and gifted in this work, which is understood as playing a vital role in enlivening God's mission in our own time and place.

Just like the sower, we may not see the fruits of our work. We may never know where the seed falls, whether it dies, takes root or whether it yields a hundredfold. We need to remember that this is God's work, not our work; God's mission, not our mission, and above all, to trust in the slow work of God believing in a future not our own.

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Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No programme accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Fr Ken Untener

(Widely attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero, this prayer was first presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979 and quoted by Pope Francis in 2015. This reflection is an excerpt from a homily written for Cardinal Dearden by then Fr Ken Untener on the occasion of the Mass for Deceased Priests, October 25, 1979).



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