What does it mean to work in a Catholic school?

Handbook for Staff working in Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Nottingham - St. Martin’s Edition

August 2010
Saint Martin’s Mission Statement
“Our aim is that all members of the community of St. Martin’s have a deep awareness of God’s love for the individual. Everyone has individual and unique God given talents. It is important for this reason that every pupil is given the opportunity of a development that is spiritual, physical, emotional, social and academic. Great emphasis is laid on understanding the importance of prayer and the need to worship individually and collectively. The school actively encourages attitudes and behaviour, which support the weak in society and counter all forms of bigotry, injustice and dishonesty. In this, the life and work of the school’s Patron Saint, Martin de Porres, is held up as an example. There is complete equality of opportunity, irrespective of race, religion, gender or academic ability and respect for the dignity of the individual is constantly maintained.”

What is a Catholic?

The glory of God is a human being fully alive.
A Catholic is a Christian who owns allegiance to the Catholic Church. A person who follows the teaching of Jesus Christ as described in the New Testament of the Bible and accepts the teaching of the Church.

Ronald Rolheiser points to four things which he calls the non-negotiable pillars of a Christian discipleship (Jesus’ followers were called disciples in the Gospels):

1. Personal prayer and a sense of personal morality
2. Social Justice
3. Mellowness / generosity of heart and spirit
4. Participation in a worshipping community.¹

These four elements should permeate our Catholic School and should be seen in every aspect of its life, as they were clearly seen in the life of Jesus himself. It is the aim of the Catholic School to integrate the Christian faith into the whole pattern of human life in all its aspects. The Church’s ‘Declaration on Christian Education’ asks Catholic educators to strive

“….to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the life of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life, and of humankind.”²

What is a Catholic School?

Saint Martin’s is a Catholic Voluntary Aided School and this booklet is intended to explain to you what is different about this school; about its approach to education; and its relation to the Catholic Church. The Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has described this distinctiveness in the following way:

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¹ Ronald Rolheiser, Seeking Spirituality 1998
² Gravissimum Educationis, Documents of Vatican II
“Catholic schools are guided in all they do by an important and coherent vision of education. This vision is based on the truth revealed by God about ourselves, our life together in community and our ultimate destiny with God. This gives rise to an educational endeavour centred on the person of Jesus Christ, who is our Way, Truth and Life. Over a long period of time, this approach to education has proved to be one that prepares students and young people well for whatever roles they take on in society or public life, as well as for their personal and family lives. The commitment of the Catholic Church to inter-faith dialogue and to working with other Christians provides a further basis for young peoples’ contribution to peaceful social cohesion.”3

The Catholic school sets out to be a place for the human person and of human persons. Pope John Paul II gave us the following mission:

“The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic School.”4

The Church provides Catholic Schools for four key reasons:

1. To assist in its mission of making Christ known to all people. (evangelisation)
2. To assist parents, who are the primary educators of their children, in the education and religious formation of their children. (catechesis and education)
3. To be at the service of the local Church - the Diocese, the parish and the Christian home.
4. To be a service to society.

What makes our Catholic School distinctive can be defined in two ways.

Firstly, in legal terms:
- The school’s governing body has much greater control over our school.
- The governing body is your employer and your contract is a national Catholic Education one and there are expectations and responsibilities involved in this.
  a) The governing body controls who attends our school.
  b) The governing body acts as the steward of the school buildings and grounds which are owned by the Dominican Sisters and managed under the trusteeship of the Diocese.

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3 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Schools 2007
4 John Paul II National Meeting of Catholic Schools 1991
- Although the school receives its budget through the Local Authority’s formula funding in the same way as other schools it does have to add 10% of its own funding to any building work or large scale refurbishment or repair.

Secondly, in religious terms:

- Our school’s primary purpose is to support Catholic parents in bringing up their children in the Catholic faith, although children from families of all faiths, and none, are welcome in our schools.

- Our school’s purpose is defined in the Mission Statement and summarised in our ‘strap line’ (repeated in the footer of each page of this document). You need to familiarise yourself with this and ensure that you understand what it means.

- Religious Education follows the national Catholic syllabus and there is an expectation that 10% of teaching time will be devoted to Religious Education.

- Each child or young person is seen as a child of God, unique and with intrinsic value.

What does this mean for you? Pope John Paul II spelt out the key implications for working in a Catholic School as follows:

“The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility….To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge…..(The changing times) demand that educators be open to new cultural influences and interpret them for young pupils in the light of Christian faith. You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching….But your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skill and competence…Through you, as a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness and joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ’s teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest.”

5 Pope John Paul II, Address to Catholic Educators, 1984
Jim Gallagher, former Director of the National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education, described the work of the Catholic School in this way:

“This educational mission entails the ongoing development of the entire potential of every person. It seeks to promote the well being and freedom of every person, made in the image and likeness of God and finding fulfilment in God alone. This is the vision which shapes the daily life of a Catholic School as a community in which faith is expressed and shared through every aspect of its activity. Through the pattern of daily prayer, through the celebration of the sacraments of the Church, through works of charity, through a striving for justice in all it does, a Catholic School seeks to be a catechetical community in which the content and the life of faith is shared.”

All within the Catholic School community should work towards fulfilling the mission statement of the school in order to ensure its distinctiveness as a Catholic School. Please make sure that you know and understand our

There are three key areas – worship, relationships and the curriculum.

**Worship**

Prayer, worship and liturgical celebration are central to our Catholic tradition. The Church has an annual pattern of worship which is set out in our Liturgical Calendar. Daily prayer and communal acts of worship form the regular reminders of our relationship with God which is the foundation of our school.

As a member of the school staff you can make its distinctiveness real by:
• Praying with students
• Helping students to reflect on their prayer
• Encouraging students to create their own prayer
• Enabling students to participate in liturgy
• Fostering a quiet and prayerful environment
• Celebrating prayer and learning through assemblies
• Participating in staff prayer
• Praying and reflecting on your work
• Working with the chaplain/priest
• Sharing with students in Eucharistic and other liturgical celebrations.

This can be a difficult aspect of the school life if you are not a prayerful person or particularly religious. Seek advice and support from our Chaplain, Father Frank; the Religious Education teachers; senior leadership members or other experienced members of staff. Read the glossary at the end of this booklet for terms that may be new to you.

Relationships

“Love one another as I have loved you”. (John 13.34) The distinctiveness of the Catholic School is lived out through the care and respect we show for each other, both in the name of Jesus, and as people of God, sharing in His divinity.

As a member of the school’s staff you can make its distinctiveness real by:

• Enjoying a personal and professionally appropriate relationship with each student
• Treating disruptive students fairly and allowing them to maintain their dignity
• Respecting the diverse backgrounds of students
• Being professional in your relationships with other staff
• Being honest in your relationships with parents
• Encouraging positive relationships between students
• Providing opportunities for reconciliation and forgiveness
Reflecting on your relationships with other members of staff and with students
Reflecting on the relationships between students in your care.

It is quite likely that students will ask your advice regarding relationships and values. You will be aware that the Catholic Church teaching on moral issues will not always be the same as the accepted public view. If you are not sure about what the Church teaches, ask the Religious Education department. If you are unsure about what to say to students or if your own views are at odds with the Church teaching refer them to the Chaplain or the Religious Education teachers. It is, however, important to be honest in your relationships. Even within the Church there are different views about some matters. It is also important to remember that many of the students will come from families for whom the Church’s teaching is either irrelevant or ignored. Our Catholic Schools are places not of indoctrination but of education within a value structure.
Curriculum

The distinctiveness of the Catholic School must be experienced by the students in the classroom. “Rather than seeing Catholic education as merely the addition of a religion course to the usual academic subjects, we want our students to make Christian sense out of what they learn in their natural science, mathematics and history courses, in their study of art, music and literature.”

As a member of the school’s staff you can make its distinctiveness real by:

- Effectively planning work for your class/teaching groups
- Preparing lessons thoroughly
- Differentiating work according to the ability of each student
- Knowing and valuing students as individuals
- Explaining work clearly to students
- Including all students in discussion
- Being patient with students who have difficulty in understanding work
- Taking time to listen to students and valuing their responses
- Valuing students’ work through your responses
- Playing an active role in curriculum development
- Providing students with a positive role model
- Creating a purposeful atmosphere in the classroom
- Celebrating students’ achievements
- Providing appropriate resources
- Using the environment and resources well and demonstrating appropriate care for them
- Relating Gospel values to everyday situations in class
- Being consistent with the values expressed in the Mission Statement
- Knowing and following guidelines in the staff handbook/curriculum policies
- Keeping full and accurate records of progress made by students
- Providing a safe environment in which students can learn
- Creating an environment in which we listen to each other’s point of view
- Being fully aware of the school’s policy in relation to sensitive issues
- Reflecting on and discussing with other staff how to respond appropriately
- Being fully involved in the school’s professional development programme.

These may seem like secular professional values that would be expected of any staff member in any school but for us in Catholic Schools they have greater force because we see our role as a vocation rather than just a job. It is our particular role in the Mission of the Church to be educators and to do the best we can for the students in our care because they, like us, are children of God.

The former Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador explained our vocation as workers in the Catholic School as follows:

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Dominic Aquila, The Value of a Catholic Liberal Arts Education 1997

Values Everyone Respect Inspire Truth Achieve Spirituality
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 realising 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. Amen

Bishop Malcolm McMahon OP – Bishop of The Diocese of Nottingham
Glossary

**Catechesis** - the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted in an organic and systematic way with a view to initiating the learners into the fullness of Christian life.

**Catholic** - means “universal”, but in terms of affiliation means anyone received into the Catholic Church through baptism.

**Diocese** - a community of the Christian faithful with their Bishop ordained in apostolic succession; usually defined as a geographical area.

**Eucharist** - the celebration of the Mass, in which bread and wine are transfigured into the body and blood of Jesus Christ and which celebrates the action of Jesus at the Last Supper celebrated on Maundy Thursday.

**Evangelisation** - the proclamation of Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him; most usually by personal example.

**Gospels** - the four books of the New Testament written by Matthew, Mark Luke and John which recount the life of Jesus and his teachings.

**Gospel Values** - those values derived from the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

**Liturgy** - the prayer and worship of the Church in community.

**Prayer** - words or actions dedicated to God.

**Salvation** - redemption from sin; usually described as forgiveness that enables us to attain eternal life with God in heaven.

**Worship** - the adoration of God through prayer and liturgy.
Dear …………,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Students poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

Written by a survivor of Auschwitz who went on to become a Headteacher