Catholic Health and Education

Teacher Background

Australian Catholic Schools
Catholic schools have been a major component of Australian education for over 175 years. During that time they have adapted to changing circumstances and changing times. In recent decades, as both the Church and Australian society have changed, Catholic schools have continued to develop and to grow in quality and public esteem.

Compared to previous generations, today’s Australian Catholic schools are relatively well equipped and staffed by well-qualified, committed teachers. Parents, students and staff of Catholic school strive to be Christ-centred communities which witness to the faith. Like all Australian schools, Catholic schools are accountable to governments and their local communities for meeting all the teaching and learning requirements of the state. They also have distinctive goals and features which derive from a core of philosophical and theological truths which are central to their character and mission. They are highly regarded by the Australian community.

Catholic schools will strive to continue to meet the needs of the Australian people as they begin to confront the major national challenges such as Reconciliation and the demand for greater social equity. It is therefore timely to take stock of Catholic schools in Australia and the ways in which they are still relevant to meeting the needs of students and parents, the Catholic community and Australian society. To do so is to take up such major challenges as that recently issued by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education in its document The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1997), namely to “devote careful attention to certain fundamental characteristics of the Catholic school, which are of great importance if its educational activity is to be effectual in the Church and in society” (#4).

The National Catholic Education Commission website contains a number of useful resources and online publications about Australian Catholic schools. It is located at: www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/general.htm

Australian Catholic Healthcare
The Catholic Church is the largest private provider of healthcare in Australia. It comprises over 800 systems, facilities, organisations and services. The sector comprises providers of care in a network of services ranging from acute care to community based services. These services have been developed throughout the course of Australia’s development in response to community needs. The services return the benefits derived from their businesses to their services and to the community; they do not operate for profit.

The Catholic health ministry is broad. Services cover aged care, disability services, family services, children and youth services, mental health services, palliative care, alcohol and drug services, veterans’ health, primary care, acute care, non-acute care, step down, rehabilitation, diagnostics, preventive public health, medical research and ethics.

Services are provided in a number of settings, for example, residential, community care, in the home, the workplace, hospitals, medical clinics, hospices, prisons and correctional facilities, as well as for people who are homeless. In addition, services are provided in rural, provincial and metropolitan settings, in private facilities as well as on behalf of the public sector.
The Catholic Church has traditionally sought to enact a strong, comprehensive set of principles as the foundation on which health care is delivered. Since the Church seeks to understand the human person in all its dimensions, the concept of health is likewise appreciated as encapsulating the broader well being and welfare of the person. Those principles are:

- **Dignity of the Human Person**
  Each person has an intrinsic value and dignity. Within the context of health care in Australia, this means everyone has a right to essential, comprehensive health care. This should be reflected in the manner through which a person is cared for along the continuum of his or her life.

- **Service**
  The provision of health care is conducted out of a spirit of service and solidarity with those in need. Health care is a social good. The degree to which health care is driven by a genuine compassionate concern for others and a selfless commitment to the well being of people will be the measure by which a community can gauge its maturity and sense of integrity. Catholic health care's mission is intricately related to this notion of service and to the respect for the sacredness of every human life.

- **Common Good**
  A commitment to the dignity of every individual leads to an appreciation and dedication to the community at large. Catholic health is an active partner in the on-going development of the health care of the community. It seeks to expand access to care, commit resources to research and training and conduct on-going professional inquiry into the social, ethical and cultural aspects of health care. Within the broader social context, the health needs of individuals must be balanced by those of the community.

- **Preference for the Poor and Under-Served**
  Catholic social teaching has embraced a 'preferential option for the poor'. This stresses a concern for the provision of adequate, timely health care for all, especially those who have little choice, opportunity or capacity to pay. Across the acute, aged care and community sector, the well and wealthy should care for the sick and poor.

- **Stewardship of Resources**
  Creation and human life are divine gifts. Christians are called to treat them responsibly and to manage them wisely. Health resources must likewise be prudently developed, maintained and shared in the interests of all. Resources for health care must be balanced alongside those needed for other essential human services

- **Subsidiarity**
  The needs of individuals and communities are best understood and satisfied by those closest to them within a spirit of solidarity and service. Where at all possible, individual autonomy and the freedom to determine one's mode of health care need to be encouraged. The administration of health care is most suitably conducted closest to those being served.