



Archbishop William Goh at the meeting with Catholic educators to address a range of issues relating to Catholic education.

Let's keep the torch burning for Catholic education

Pressing need to recover the Catholic identity in mission schools

Harvey Wee

Archbishop William Goh has made a special appeal to the Catholic community, from parents to young people, alumni of mission schools, educators to benefactors, to come together and work towards preserving the identity, values and ethos of the Catholic schools in Singapore.

This call to help strengthen the Catholic schools comes amid often-heard feedback from parents and others to the Archbishop that the Catholic schools today are not "Catholic enough".

With this feedback in mind, Archbishop met a group of Catholic educators in August to address a range of issues relating to Catholic education. The outcome of the meeting is the Catholic Education Pastoral Letter to all the faithful.

Generally, many parents, even those who are non-Catholic, are known to have chosen to send their children to go through a Catholic education because of the values taught in the mission schools.

So, what is it about a Catholic school education? In Archbishop's words: "To be truly Catholic, our schools must be Catholic not just in identity but

in their self-understanding. This means that Catholic education must be inspired by the Gospel, faith in God, and our dignity as God's children to share in the life of God eternally.

"Promoting human dignity is the first principle underpinning a Catholic Education. This is how Catholic education contributes to an evangelising Church by announcing the good news that we are God's children; which is our true identity and our heavenly calling," said Archbishop in his Catholic Education Pastoral Letter.

A Catholic education seeks to enable every young person to live a vibrant life and be the glory of God. Archbishop explained that students must be passionate in pursuing truth, goodness, love and beauty. They must grow to be the beacon for others by serving God and humanity, and living a life that is purposeful, meaningful and fruitful.

Passing good values

Archbishop's call for action comes against the backdrop of many mission schools seeing a dwindling of Religious Sisters and Brothers to carry on the work of Catholic education. Many of their roles are gradually

being handed over to the lay people. And, this lay group would need the support of the Archdiocese to continue the Catholic tradition so that they in turn may pass on to the future generations of lay leaders.

Thus, the way to respond to this trend is for everyone to have a shared responsibility "to make it happen." And characteristic of his straight-talking style, he pointed out: "Just lamenting and complaining will not change the situation. So, let us together recover our Catholic identity for our Catholic schools and ensure that our young people will be educated in the Catholic faith."

"Let us do this to strengthen the Catholic ethos of our schools so that our students' future will be bright and happy as they contribute to the Church, country and humanity," said Archbishop.

"So, my dear parents, young people, Catholic educators, and benefactors, please help us to make our Catholic Schools truly Catholic in identity, community and in ethos and values. There are always places available in Catholic schools for our Catholic students, provided we are not choosy in wanting to send our children only to the top and prestigious schools," he added.

And, to Catholic teachers, he urged them to join the Catholic schools so that good and right values can be passed on. "Catholics and alumni students who have a passion and calling to volunteer themselves in Catholic schools are most welcome."

In reiterating his often-voiced concern about the secularisation in our society, he said as a consequence there is the absence of the Sacred in public life, the loss of contact with the presence of God, which leads to a loss of faith and despair about the meaning of life and the future of humanity.

"The consequence is that our young people are imbibing the relativistic, individualistic and materialistic values of the world, taking their directions and values in life from social media and the Internet rather than from the Gospel which speaks of integrity, truth, charity, selfless service and a clear hope for eternal life with God," said Archbishop Goh.

To confront this trend, it is thus critical that parents ensure that their children are given a proper foundation in Catholic education. This is because the whole purpose of education is more than just gaining academic knowledge.

Education is more than academic excellence

"Education must be holistic, which means that our young people must be formed as persons in the aspects of human relationship, moral values and spiritual life. Catholic education seeks to form holistic persons who can live out the fullness of life by discovering their vocation in life, the ultimate goal of which is to become children of God.

"It is this realisation that should drive every young person to excel in every aspect of their intellectual, human, moral and spiritual formation so that they can find meaning and purpose in life, especially by giving themselves to the service of society.

He also warned that an education that is only focused on academic excellence might enable a young person to achieve material success in life just for himself, but he will not find true happiness. This is because the person would lack an ultimate meaning and purpose to live for. In order to find happiness, a human person must live in a transcendent manner, he said.

Please see pages 2-3 for the full version of Archbishop's Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education. □