

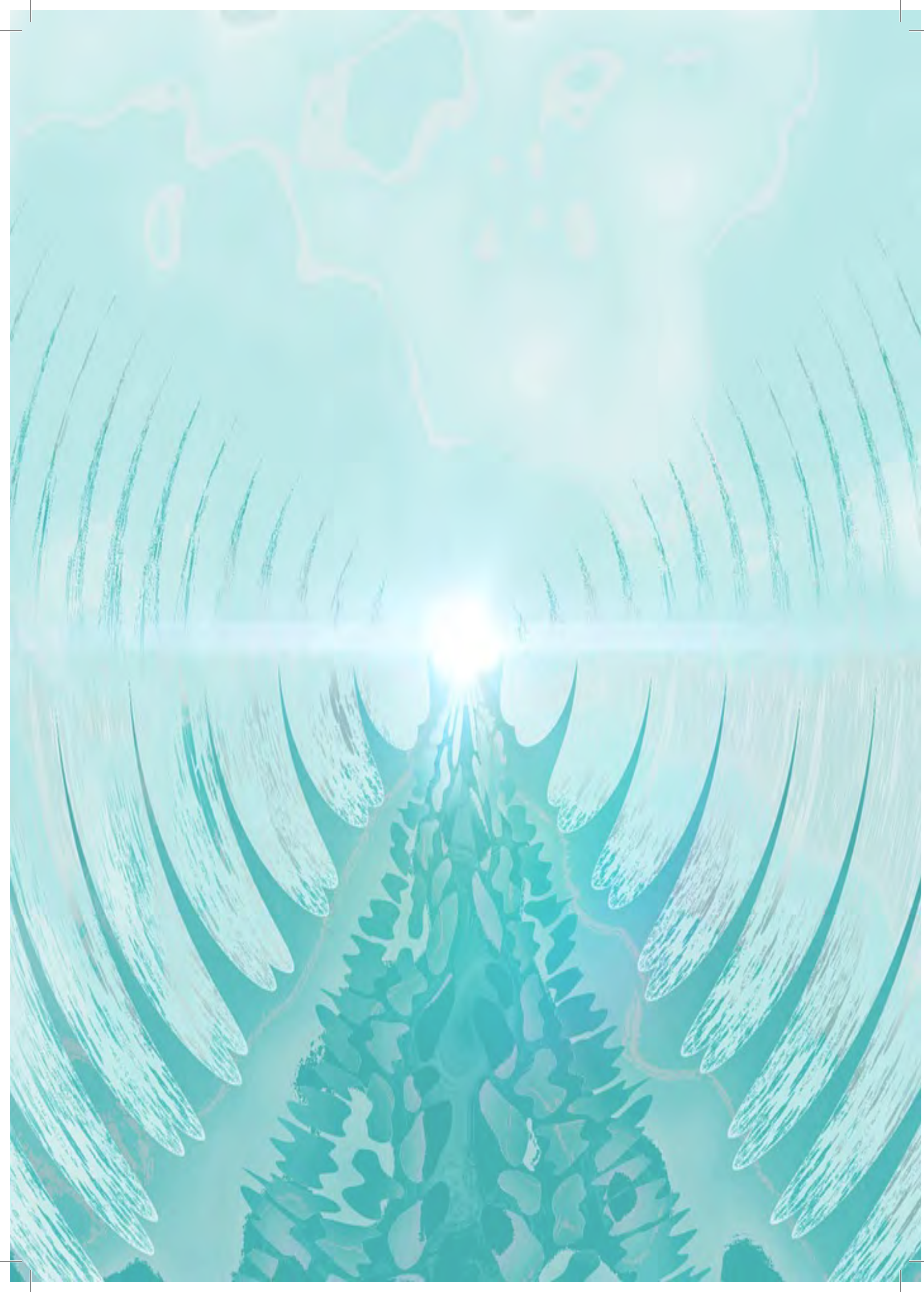


HEART OF A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus Secondary • 13 March 2017

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

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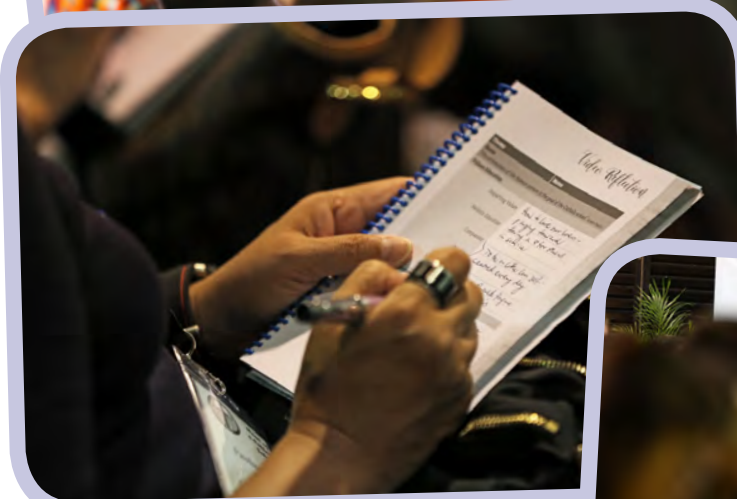
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QUOTES

FROM THE VIDEO

Catholic education is important and relevant today because we believe that the child is a child of God, made in the image and likeness of God.

Fr Edward Seah
executive director, ACCS

Education is not about achieving good results. I strongly believe it is education for life. It is not about the subject; it is about imparting values.

Jackie Cheng
vice-principal, SGSS

It is the culture, the environment, the climate, way people treat one another, how the teachers teach.

Janet Ang
alumna, CHIJ OLGC, CHIJ SJC, CJC

It is not about what they taught but the way they interacted and built relationship with us.

Joshua Goh
alumnus, CHS, CJC

Despite being a non-Catholic, I do not feel a sense of exclusion from the peers around me because I am always welcomed to participate in various Catholic activities around the school.

Derrick Tan
student, CJC

The main focus, the primary focus should be: when you graduate, how much better a person are you.

Gerard Ng
student, SPS

God has entrusted our school with these students for the four or five years that they are with us. Their religious background or race doesn't matter. It is human beings that God has put into our hands. So within those few years the students are with us, how have we helped them grow to be better persons?

Br Nicholas Seet FSC
teacher, SPS

For me growing up in a Catholic primary and secondary school, there is a strong emphasis on being inclusive and servant leadership.

Masheyr Devaser
alumnus, SJIJ, SGSS

STUDENTS

Key Aspects of the Heart of a Catholic School	Desired Outcomes to Nurture the Heart of a Catholic School
<p>A Catholic school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ has the various aspects of school life centred on the awareness of God and the sacred ♦ has a spirit of unity which emanates from prayers and Masses ♦ promotes an environment of love and care ♦ promotes the embodiment of values by stakeholders ♦ is where stakeholders inspire each other towards holiness ♦ is where stakeholders encounter God through others ♦ is where stakeholders grow to be Christ-like ♦ creates persons for others ♦ practises an active faith in community ♦ teaches values in relation to Bible stories and God's love ♦ is where one enters distant from God but leaves closer to God ♦ promotes trust in God's call in one's future vocation 	<p>We desire that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ participation by non-Catholics at prayers, Masses and Catholic events be increased ♦ greater encouragement and support be given to students who participate in Catholic events and ministries ♦ the frequency and importance of Religious Education lessons be increased ♦ a mix of traditional activities (such as Mass) and non-traditional activities (such as praise and worship) be ensured ♦ Catholic CCAs and programmes be available, tailored to specific age groups and made more enjoyable ♦ a stronger school spirit and sense of community be promoted ♦ exemplary acts of service be showcased

Additional ideas

- ♦ Increase emphasis on character and values and reduce reliance on academic performance
- ♦ Ensure that no-one is left behind
- ♦ Increase awareness of prayer in other religions traditions
- ♦ Increase the presence of priests and religious
- ♦ Introduce more student-led programmes
- ♦ Implement school-based cell groups
- ♦ Increase collaboration among Catholic schools



SHARING

BREAKOUT SESSION 1

EDUCATORS

Key Aspects of the Heart of a Catholic School	Desired Outcomes to Nurture the Heart of a Catholic School
<p>A Catholic school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ places God at the centre of the educational process ♦ builds an awareness of the presence of God ♦ focuses on service to God and others ♦ sees every child as a child of God entrusted to the school for education and faith development ♦ builds relationships ♦ focuses on values and character education, with a focus on spirituality ♦ practises inclusiveness ♦ has stakeholders communicating and living out Christ-centred values in ways that influence and inspire others ♦ enjoys the strong support of the Catholic community ♦ promotes the love for learning 	<p>We desire that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ educators be role models of spiritual depth and consistent behaviour ♦ teachers share and lead prayer at the start of the school day ♦ faith be shared to enable others to see faith from different perspectives ♦ all recognize the uniqueness of individuals and see Christ in everyone ♦ an inclusive Catholic culture be evident through leadership, prayer routines and role modelling ♦ interreligious harmony be promoted ♦ communication, collaboration and outreach be increased among all stakeholders ♦ priests and religious be visibly present through pastoral visits ♦ Catholic parents be enlisted to reinforce the Religious Education programme ♦ a platform be in place for schools to share best practices

Additional ideas

- ♦ Provide students with spiritual experiences through interaction with friends and religious
- ♦ Have moments of silence for recollection and reflection
- ♦ Align values education with school values
- ♦ Let the school be a place of hope where people fall but pick themselves up again



SCHOOL LEADERS

Key Aspects of the Heart of a Catholic School	Desired Outcomes to Nurture the Heart of a Catholic School
<p>A Catholic school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ has God-centredness as its soul ♦ practises Christ-centred decision-making ♦ promotes inclusiveness ♦ is characterized by affirmation, empathy and trust ♦ adopts a deep, personal emphasis in values education ♦ is where no child is left behind ♦ focuses on the Catholic identity in nurturing the child of God ♦ practises tough love to push the limits of character and academic potential ♦ has stakeholders who are role models of values ♦ focuses on the heart of the teacher ♦ has evidence of a moral compass ♦ promotes spiritual awareness ♦ has a prayer life ♦ practises discernment ♦ is where all think and act like Christ ♦ sees all as children of God ♦ serves the community and society 	<p>We desire that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the Catholic school ethos be championed ♦ non-Catholic educators be coached towards an understanding of Catholic ethos ♦ collaboration with parishes and the seminary be increased ♦ a Christ-centred community be built ♦ stakeholders be inspired to appreciate the importance of character and values education ♦ the presence of Catholic teachers and school leaders be increased ♦ an awareness of Catholic practices, rituals and values be deepened ♦ celebrations that promote Christ-centred values be introduced ♦ the privilege of being able to talk about God be harnessed ♦ staff be helped to recognize that they are instruments and witnesses of Christ ♦ external stakeholders be welcomed to aid with the teaching of religious programmes ♦ parents and the wider community be inspired to look beyond common notions of success

Additional ideas

- ♦ Address the differences between values needed to succeed in life (such as financial and career success) and those defined by a Catholic ethos



SHARING

BREAKOUT SESSION 1

PARENTS, ALUMNI, CHAPLAINCY TEAMS, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEAMS

Key Aspects of the Heart of a Catholic School	Desired Outcomes to Nurture the Heart of a Catholic School
<p>A Catholic school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ sees Catholic education as a way of life ♦ is aware of the impact of Catholic education on society ♦ adopts a Catholic ethos characterized by a language of love, service, inclusion, acceptance, empathy, compassion, humility and gratitude ♦ recognizes every child as a unique gift from God ♦ is where educators persevere in love with a mindful focus on teaching as a vocation ♦ regards character, values and spiritual development as more important than academic excellence ♦ is aware of the call to service ♦ supports students in discovering their mission in life to help others ♦ adopts a culture centred on a collective understanding of a loving God through prayer, relationships and witnessing ♦ has students engaged in Catholic activities in school ♦ plants the seed of faith in students through God-encounters ♦ practises faith sharing ♦ has all members participating in Catholic practices ♦ focuses on relationships and community ♦ designs programmes on the principle of God as the centre of a Catholic school ♦ utilizes Catholic materials for students' character formation ♦ promotes continuing education from primary to college levels 	<p>We desire that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the school's Catholic identity be developed, and a strong sense of identity and belonging to the school and community be nurtured ♦ stakeholders be formed to embrace the Catholic ethos ♦ student leaders be the driving force of the Catholic ethos ♦ support from the Archdiocese be evident ♦ the Archdiocese help parents to understand the role of Catholic schools and the school-selection process ♦ parents understand that faith is not just practised on Sundays ♦ ample prayer experiences be available with participation by all ♦ students develop a personal relationship with Christ ♦ Catholic stakeholders confidently demonstrate and share faith with all ♦ teachers be filled with hope and joy in all circumstances ♦ teachers and Catholic students interact over meals ♦ more time and resources be allocated for fellowship ♦ students be provided with faith experiences ♦ new avenues to share God's love as teachers and parents be explored ♦ Catholic schools have more Catholic teachers ♦ chaplains and religious be present ♦ conversion be recognized as something that may happen later in life ♦ the network of Catholic schools be strengthened ♦ collaboration among Catholic stakeholders be increased

Additional ideas

- ♦ Convince parents to support school activities

SPONSORING AUTHORITIES, SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Key Aspects of the Heart of a Catholic School	Desired Outcomes to Nurture the Heart of a Catholic School
<p>A Catholic school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ manifests Christ's love through pastoral care and in communication ♦ recognizes every child as a gift from God entrusted to the school ♦ is anchored in God as the moral compass for life ♦ forms the heart 	<p>We desire that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the spiritual value of self-knowledge be taught ♦ a deep experience of Jesus be provided ♦ the notion of a Catholic community be expanded, by having parishes adopt schools and priests animate school life

Additional ideas

- ♦ Include the spiritual life of school on the agenda of meetings of Boards of Governors
- ♦ Form the members of Boards of Governors to contribute to the spiritual life of the school
- ♦ Let School Management Committees assume an active role in upholding the school ethos
- ♦ Provide for the direct involvement of alumni in school programmes



VIEWPOINTS

PANEL DISCUSSION

Facilitator

AD Fr Adrian Danker SJ

Participants

GF Lin Gan Feng (*educator*)

MC Magdalene Chin (*school leader*)

SE Toh Si En (*student*)

SS Serene Sim (*parent*)

TS Sr Theresa Seow FDCC (*school management committee*)

AD What is the one significant thing that defines a Catholic education?

GF ♦ Importance of Christian service, to God and each other in the community

SE ♦ Having a community in a Catholic school (the importance of the various stakeholders)
♦ Some people deepen their faith after entering a Catholic school
♦ Inclusivity and openness of the school culture
♦ Teachers and students forge close bonds: teachers share their difficulties as well, humanizing themselves

MC ♦ Relationship with God
♦ A Catholic school is life-giving and transformational
♦ God is the centre of everything: decisions, relationships
♦ Development of the spirit



- AD Being Catholic is more than symbols; it focuses on the encounter with Jesus. How do we bring students closer to the heart of this Christ-centred education?
- TS
- ♦ Multiple collaboration to address how we witness to the Christian life
 - ♦ Through daily contact and interaction
 - ♦ The importance of reflection
 - ♦ Catholics need to be role models and examples
 - ♦ Choosing values that align with those of the Church
 - ♦ Religious working with key personnel to encourage them in what they have to do as Catholic leaders – the importance of witnessing
 - ♦ The need to be inclusive, all-embracing
 - ♦ The school must not compromise on its beliefs even though we embrace all – being a part of the community, yet being open to differences and learning from those differences
 - ♦ Emphasize the need for parents and students to be part of the Catholic activities because they have chosen to be in the school, yet be accepting of differences
 - ♦ Catholic education is a privilege
 - ♦ We are not here to widen the common ground, but to welcome all to the sacred space
- SS
- ♦ Wanted both my sons to enter a Catholic school
 - ♦ Made a conscious effort, because if we do not spend our time bringing up our children properly, they will miss out on the fullness of the faith
 - ♦ Need the help of schools to give the child an experience of what it is to be a Catholic – the environment is important as 10–11 hours are spent in school each day
 - ♦ Schools should provide the environment to encounter Jesus – every child given the chance to experience God first-hand
 - ♦ It's about holistic education and the embodiment of values



VIEWPOINTS

PANEL DISCUSSION

- AD The need for encounter so that the child experiences Christ first-hand. What are your thoughts on the heart of Catholic education being tough love? Catholic education does not settle for mediocrity – it is about stretching talents.
- SE
- ♦ Students' choice of a Catholic school reflects their choice of God and their openness to experiencing God through the various school activities
 - ♦ Friends miss certain Catholic rituals after enrolling in a secular school
- MC
- ♦ What is a pull factor for non-Catholics to choose a Catholic school? If we are inclusive, what makes Catholic schools relevant, especially given the rise of secularism?
 - ♦ Resonance with the values of the Catholic church: values that resonate from spirituality rather than simple moral values
 - ♦ Staff bearing witness to these values
 - ♦ Catholic schools are about faith and pastoral care
 - ♦ Non-Catholic parents believe that the staff and teachers bear witness and give more; they are comfortable with us talking about God
- TS
- ♦ Parents choose a Catholic school because of the values that the school imparts
 - ♦ Results are improving, but all Catholic schools realize the importance of putting back the basics
 - ♦ Some have the wrong mindset: they think they are being inclusive by removing school-wide Masses and prayers, but these rituals are our way of demonstrating and witnessing to our faith
- GF
- ♦ Non-Catholics enter a Catholic school because of its values and what the school stands for
 - ♦ There is a strong sense of belief, and self-reflection to strengthen their own sets of beliefs, leading to service for the good of all humankind
- SS
- ♦ A Muslim parent was very involved in the school's Catholic events, believing that the Catholic school espoused the values that he was looking for
 - ♦ Values of a Catholic education are the way to go
 - ♦ All stakeholders have to play their part



AD Recognizing the value of the child growing up and moving on to serve the community. What are some of the things that we need to develop and grow for the heart of Catholic education?

- MC
- ♦ The soul of a Catholic school must resonate from Christ; all decisions and actions must be Christ-centred
 - ♦ There is no need to be apologetic for being a Catholic school
 - ♦ In order for students to grow in faith, service and mission, the staff play an important role – the soul of the Catholic school must come from the people, namely the staff: to show Christ-like compassion
 - ♦ Catholic staff need to know that they have a part to play; we need a significant number of staff to believe

GF ♦ The absence of a religious brother in the school has led to the erosion of the Catholic identity, thus removing a bit of the Catholic soul – so the staff decided that they needed to step up to grow the soul in each member of staff

- TS
- ♦ Catholic schools should come together to support each other by sharing resources
 - ♦ The impact of a Catholic education is often seen only further down the road
 - ♦ Many former students become Catholics as adults, so we should not look at the smallness of our actions
 - ♦ It is important to grow the church – evangelizing to align schools with this vision
 - ♦ How prepared are we to evangelize?

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AD *Questions from conference attendees*

(1) How do we balance results and the Catholic identity? Stretching every child – Catholic schools will also strive for excellence if we believe that every child is a gift from God. (2) What is the heart of a Catholic student? What can teachers do better?

- SE
- ♦ Students need to take the initiative to be a part of the community – a community to rely on, which can strengthen their faith
 - ♦ Catholic students need to take a step forward to invite non-Catholics to participate in Catholic school activities, and so build community

- SS
- ♦ Children model their behaviour on ours – we are constantly being judged
 - ♦ Parents who come in to support the school – it is important that they send the same message as the school
 - ♦ This is God's ministry – everything we do is by the grace of God
 - ♦ The importance of planting that seed in our children
 - ♦ God calls a willing heart

- AD
- ♦ In the person of Jesus is the way to teach, the way to approach education
 - ♦ This is an invitation to seek inspiration from Jesus and go deep with him
 - ♦ Education is a process which takes time
 - ♦ We must see the classroom as holy ground
 - ♦ We need to unleash the holy desire in each student to become someone better by the time they leave us

RESPONSE

ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM GOH



So many ideas, so many questions, so many perspectives – how should we bring all these together? What I notice from hearing your views is that most of you tend to focus on the characteristics of a Catholic school. You mentioned things like a Catholic school must be inclusive, must be warm, must have good values, spiritual life, good rapport, exemplary teachers. All these are true, but of course some of them are not exclusive to Catholic schools – other schools also have these values: integrity, honesty, inclusivity, service to country, service to people. So the question we need to ask is: What is distinctive about Catholic schools?

What is education?

How we define Catholic education actually presupposes a foundational point of departure. What is education? Education is to form a human person, to help that person realize his full potential. Education therefore is concerned with how we can help every young person to become the person he is called to be. Education must be integral – it is not simply academic (although that is important, because without academic and skills formation, we are useless and cannot serve), but we also need human formation, which is very important today, because society is filled with many people who are broken, wounded, dysfunctional. Human formation is needed today more than at any other time.

Moral formation

Besides human formation, we have the important dimension of moral formation, which is important for every human person. Without morality, without ethics, we cannot build a cohesive society. Just imagine: if our leaders are corrupt, with no integrity, no-one will believe the government, and the whole country will be in chaos. This is the problem in the world today: leaders have lost their credibility – corporate leaders, government leaders, even religious leaders. People are sceptical of those in authority, including young people, and, as one parent said, they are observing us all the time; we teach not so much by words, but by how we conduct ourselves.

Spiritual formation

One more area is spiritual formation, which is not an added dimension. Every human person has a calling to the transcendent. Schools that do not provide spiritual formation in some ways will end up producing inadequately formed individuals – they can be academically smart, people of great skills, but without spiritual formation they have something lacking in their lives and in their hearts, because every human person is called to ultimate truth, ultimate good and ultimate love in life. That is why we are transcendent beings. No-one can be fulfilled simply because he is a great lawyer, earning tons of money, doing well in life. A person is happy only when he discovers meaning and purpose. That is why we are trying to form human beings with the ultimate meaning and purpose in life. It is not about achieving good grades, getting a big job or high status, but about happiness. Do we want to secure happiness for our children, real happiness? Many professionals are doing well, but their lives may be in a mess, empty.

The heart of Catholic education

Having said this, we come to the heart of Catholic education. If I were to sum up all that you have said, Catholic education is dependent on this one thing: What is your understanding of the human person, or, to use a theological term, what is Christian anthropology? That is the key to Catholic education. It is important to ask ourselves: Who is man? Is he just made of matter? Does he have a spirit? Does he have a soul? What is his calling in life? That is the question we need to answer for our students. What is our vocation? Why were we created in this world? What are we here for? Where did we come from? Where are we going? What happens after death? Why is there suffering? Why is there sin in this world? These are the questions we need to ask, because education is to bring a young person to his full development, and that person cannot live meaningfully and purposefully until these questions are answered. Therefore how we understand the human person, his vocation, his calling in life, and what it takes for him to be fulfilled and happy, will determine how we educate this child. This means that your school, your curriculum, your management, your teachers, your ambience are all means to raise this child to his full potential. If you don't provide spiritual formation, the child cannot arrive at his full potential. That is what Catholic education provides. Then this child will be able to really become who he is and what God has created him to be.

Jesus as reference point

Catholic education takes as its reference point Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. For those of us who are Christians, we believe that Jesus is the true man, and he is the true man only because he is true God. Jesus lived his life fully, thoroughly – he was totally a human person – but he was the happiest man because he was without sin. Sin makes us unhappy: anger, resentment, bitterness, competition, ambition – they prevent us from being truly happy. And so in Catholic education, we want to offer our students nothing less than Jesus Christ. Jesus is our model. Making them Catholics is not important; what is important is to give them the best life possible. We choose Jesus only because we feel that Jesus can give us the fullness of life, and that Jesus is our teacher. So in Catholic education, everything we do is inspired by Jesus: the way we talk to our staff, the way we treat our students. In the Catholic vision, every human person is important, so we treat every child with respect, regardless of their religion, regardless of whether they are physically or mentally challenged, because every child is important, every child is a child of God.

RESPONSE

ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM GOH

The Christian vision

For us, we have a Christian motive in our service: we serve because we want to reveal Jesus to others, we want to give them a higher vision of life, we want them to encounter Jesus. Catholic education gives people the drive to study hard, because they know what they are working for: not for grades, but for excellence to find fullness of life, meaning and purpose, which is service. That is why in Catholic schools we speak of the importance of community, love, supporting each other. That is what Catholic schools are all about. This Christian vision comes from our own personal faith in Jesus Christ. Do our Catholic educators own this vision? The Christian vision is a universal vision, and Gospel values are universal.

Fullness of life

What do I want for young people? I want to give them the fullness of life; I don't want to shortchange them. We do this through the curriculum we offer, the integral development, the sense of community, the sense of prayer, giving them the possibility to realize their transcendent calling, because deep in the heart of every human person there is a need for God, or at least a search for the transcendent. For those who are not Catholic, as they come into a Catholic school, though they may not know Jesus or have had an encounter with him, by embracing Catholic values they can indirectly embrace Christ.





On 20 April 2010, I sustained a traumatic brain injury while representing SJI in judo at the National Schools Games. Following the accident, I fell into a coma for two months. Subsequently, I lost even the most basic human functions: eating and drinking were impossible for me, nor was I able to turn my head or sit or talk. It's indeed a miracle that I can even be here today. Simply put, the biggest miracle is that I am alive today. My injury was so severe that there was a high chance I might not even wake up from the coma.

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The initial prognosis was hopeless, but God's wisdom and plans are beyond our grasp. He allowed miracles to happen one after another. After the two-month coma, I woke up to relearn all my human functions like a baby again. I took an additional month to regain enough core strength to turn my head and sit. And while the likelihood of me losing my ability of speech forever is high, the most awe-inspiring miracle happened on the day when the Gospel was about Jesus healing a mute. I regained my speech that very day!

Prayer support

I strongly believe that these miracles could only be possible because of the prayer support I had. And I know for sure that the SJI community has played a humongous role in the manifestation of these miracles.

Back then, as soon as the news of my injury reached SJI, they fervently kept me in their daily morning prayers and weekly Masses. The prognosis might not have been promising, but SJI never ceased in their hope in the Lord. They started the prayer tree project: students were allowed to write their prayer intentions for me on slips of paper. The response was overwhelming! I remember the teacher in charge passing me those slips of paper every week during her visits. They were countless. And God must have heard the persistent pleas of these Josephians and decided to give me a second go in life!

SHARING

MATTHEW TAN

Return to school

After almost a year of recuperation, I was ready to return to school. SJI coordinated with my therapists and parents to give me the best environmental accommodation they could on my return to SJI: by hosting a family conference. I will never forget the stupendous welcome I received on my return. Josephians of all levels formed a pathway from the school gate to lead me into the meeting venue.

A week later, school started with an official greeting by the whole school to me. I was wheeled to the grandstand during morning assembly, facing the whole school. As the principal announced my return, the whole school cheered. I was moved to tears. I was so overwhelmed and humbled by the unwavering love and support of my fellow Josephians. I felt I was just another student, so why such a grand homecoming?

My schoolmates and teachers continued to take good care of me. Whenever I was seen alone, students took the initiative to ask me if I required help. They would always gladly assist me in the tasks that troubled me, such as going to the washroom or even picking up a pen – yes, I could not even pick up a pen that I had dropped on the ground. But my Josephian community did not see me as a burden; they continued to embrace me as if I was their brother.

Challenges at school

It wasn't easy for me to ease back into school. Besides my reliance on others to meet my care needs, the greatest challenge for me then was pursuing my studies. As a result of my injury, I lacked the mental stamina of a normal person. As soon as the first day ended, I was tremendously fatigued. In fact, I encountered difficulties paying attention not long after the first period began. Since my mental processing was also impaired, I had trouble absorbing whatever was taught by the teachers.

With that, it was no surprise that I flunked my exams. For the first exam after my return, I failed five out of six subjects. I continued to fail many of my exam subjects throughout the two years after my return, including an epic failure of 27% for my Physics prelim exam.

Faith and hope

But my teachers never gave up on me. They exemplified faith and hope in the way they helped and encouraged me. No matter how grim the situation looked then, they never gave up on me. They saw that I was trying my best, and had an unbreakable hope in me that my efforts would reap their rewards one day. This hope was manifested in their unconditional support for me as I took on the greatest mountain in my life then: the O Level examination. My teachers gave me one-to-one consultation sessions whenever I requested them, despite their hectic schedules. To enable my participation in the night study classes, they offered to drive me home, regardless of the inconvenience it must have caused them – these classes ended late at night, and my teachers lived far away. They knew that I was working hard and did everything they could to support me.

SJI provided me with the springboard I needed to maximize my potential. I did my best with whatever time, energy and 'teacher resources' I was given, and performed so well at the O Levels that I obtained a scholarship for my polytechnic studies!

Reflections of Christ

From the night of my accident onwards, my SJI teachers and friends showed me and my family a reflection of Christ. When news of my injury reached the SJI community, many of my teachers and classmates immediately rushed to the hospital that night to give me moral support. Friar Michael D'Cruz, the school chaplain, assured my anxious and worried parents, 'Tonight, let the Lord take care of him,' and even offered to drive them home. Subsequently, he would come to the hospital to anoint me almost weekly while I was in a coma.

Similarly, many of my schoolmates and teachers visited me regularly despite it being their exam period. Why? Because they believed strongly in the miracle that was yet to be: that I would recover one day.

When I returned to SJI, there were a number of instances when I felt like giving up, as I was overwhelmed by negativity. For example, when I was preparing for the O Level English oral exam with my English teacher, I wept out of helplessness on several occasions. I was unable to think of an adequate response during the conversation component due to my delayed thought processes. However, my teacher did not give up on me; she held my hands to pray with me.

My teachers knew that faith meant a lot to me, and would often encourage me whenever they saw me during morning chapel sessions. I remember, too, that before my O Level Physics paper, a Physics teacher even took time to sit with me and pray with me in the chapel. What further astounded me was that she was of a different religion, and she wasn't even my Physics teacher, yet she continued to love me.

You can trust me when I say that each interaction I had with a teacher has left an imprint on my heart. I guess sharing two anecdotes is enough for now; we will not be able to go home if you expect me to recount all of them to you.



SHARING

MATTHEW TAN

Foundation of faith

SJI has been for me the foundation that my faith has been built on. The way the SJI community provided for my needs gave me a tangible certainty that God will provide for me, so long as I use fully the resources and talents he gives me to journey through whatever path he has planned for me to embark on.

Furthermore, SJI initiated in me a life of prayer. Back then, I would arrive in school 30 minutes before our daily morning prayer. I would meditate and pray the Rosary during this time. With this and morning prayer, when I committed the day to God, I would be refreshed to face the day! Mornings at SJI allowed me the environment of peace and serenity to find refuge amid the craziness of school.

These experiences cultivated in me a habit of prayer. I still make time for prayer every morning before I start the day. Today, prayer has become a very big part of my life; it has become to me a means of support from which I draw strength from for the challenges I face each day.

Faith goggles

Thanks to SJI, my eyes were opened to the assurance of God's covenant, that he has always been with me. My faith allowed me to witness in a tangible way God's miracles, signs and angels, bringing me courage and joy to walk on through life's trials.

For example, before my O Level Chinese listening comprehension exam began back in 2012, a leaf bouncing up and down outside the window caught my attention. I suddenly felt a sense of peace coming over me as I realized it must have been God cheering me on. The accident may have taken away much of my physical and cognitive abilities, but the Lord has given me a greater treasure: the ability to notice him in the simplest of events. He has given me a set of faith goggles.

Life has never been easy, especially since I left SJI to be in a secular tertiary educational institution, but my experiences in SJI have enabled me to hold firm to God, trusting in his divine providence and plans for my life. Having been so blessed myself, I have become excited to pass on the love God has so abundantly blessed me with.

I graduated from polytechnic last year and am currently employed part-time at CHIJ St Theresa's Convent as a pastoral care officer. This part-time employment has allowed me to be actively involved as a volunteer in my parish, spreading the love of God to whomever I meet. My contract ends in August, and I am not sure what my next step will be. Yet I know I am called to simply trust in the Lord, who is already ahead of me.

Thanks to educators

I would like to say a big thank you to all educators for taking up this noble vocation. It is never easy to manage adolescent monkeys like us – yes, I am referring to us, your students. But you, our principals, vice-principals, teachers and many other educators who work tirelessly behind the scenes to support us, have embraced the role to walk with us through life's arduous terrains. You are Jesus to us, healing and inspiring us with love. Thank you for being more than teachers. You have been the lightbearers in the darkness of our hearts, sowing seeds of humility, courage and wisdom.

A HUMBLE LETTER OF THANKS

14 March 2017

DEAR EDUCATORS,

This is simply a letter to thank y'all for the amazing experience I had yesterday during my segment in the Catholic Education Conference!

Thank y'all for being keen listeners. I am aware that I wasn't speaking comprehensibly most of the time. (I had a short snippet of my speech recorded)

However, y'all were paying me your full attention... That was why y'all could understand my slur, catch my humor and laugh with me :).

Most importantly, thank you all for accepting me in spite of my prominent imperfections. For looking beyond my undesirable disabilities into my identity as a child of God. Y'all had already displayed this very hallmark of Catholic educators so very well!

Many of you even took effort to step forward to affirm me and to shake my hands. Gestures as these are the very tangible experiences of God that keep me going- what great joy it is to know that I am appreciated!

I have written a short prayer (below) I would like to dedicate to all of you.

May the joy, peace and love of God be upon you today, and every day!

MATTHEW

Dear Father God, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit the Advocate, Three-in-One God,
We thank you for the gift of Catholic education in Singapore. In Catholic schools lies the heart of Jesus, bringing peace, joy, love and hope to our broken world.

We thank you for calling Catholic educators to their various roles in this grace-filled vocation, in which generations of young men and women have been moved to serve your purpose in this world.

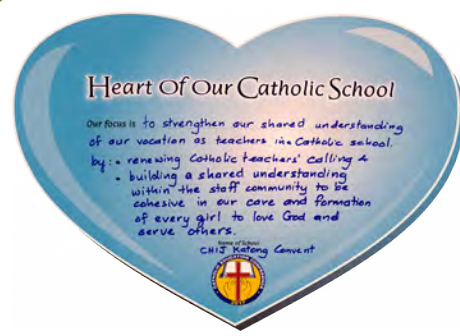
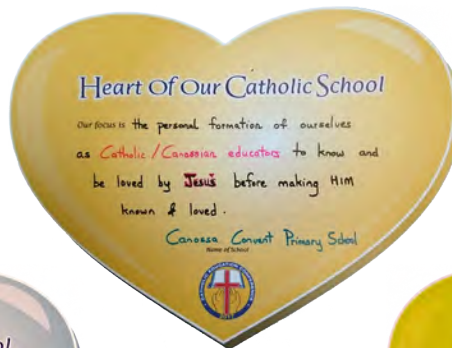
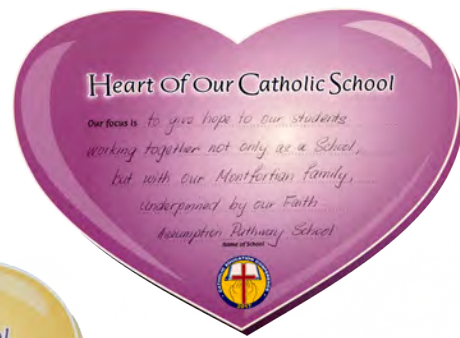
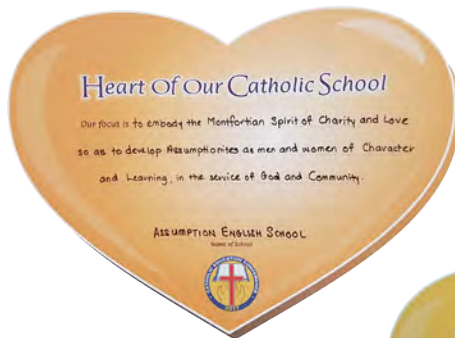
We invite you to pour your graces on every one of us. Move us to love our students as you love us. Grant us wisdom and understanding in educating our young ones, to guide them to become the persons you desire them to be.

Lord, you are magnified the most when we are broken. When we cannot, you can. We pray that we may be able to find solace and serenity when we are trying our best. We trust that you are moving in our efforts to transform the hearts of our students. We believe that in your time, the seeds of love we sow will bear fruit. Take away whatever doubt we may have in carrying out your will.

May the passion, joy, hope and courage you have instilled in us for the purpose of education never fade away. Amen.

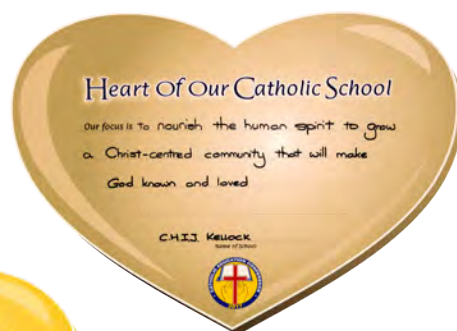
COMMITMENTS

BREAKOUT SESSION 2



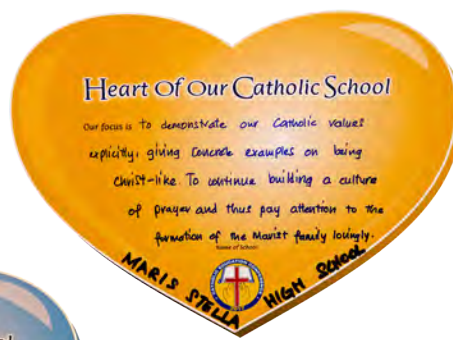
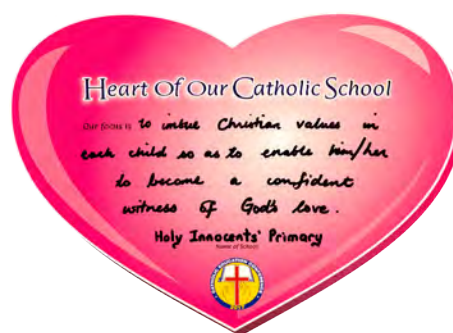
COMMITMENTS

BREAKOUT SESSION 2



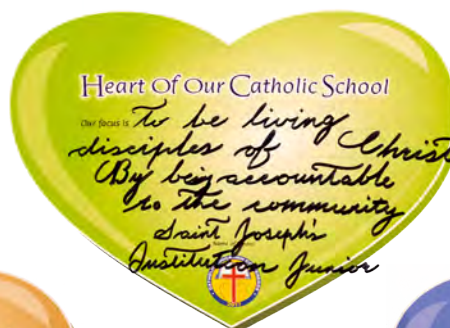
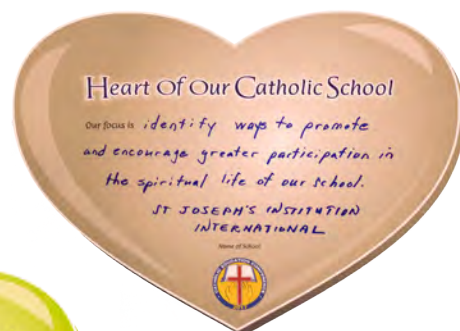
COMMITMENTS

BREAKOUT SESSION 2



COMMITMENTS

BREAKOUT SESSION 2



SUMMATION

PROF TAN CHENG HAN, ACCS Chair



Positive energy

The spirit of the first Catholic Education Conference in 2013 had a little bit of doom and gloom about it – the underlying sense then was that we were not in a good place. At the second conference in 2015, we had moved on a little but were still tentative, trying to find our feet. At this third conference, there is a much more positive attitude and energy in the participants and the discussions. Are we at an inflexion point? As educators in Catholic schools, are we starting to feel more confident about our mission and role? Are we ready to reclaim our place as educators of the first order in Singapore? Are we in the midst of recreating that place?

Catholic ethos

Why did I become a Catholic despite growing up in the context of a Protestant family? Studying in a Catholic school, for me, was influential – there were good teachers; the brothers were to me the epitome of holiness and goodness and a great example; there was a compassionate and inclusive environment, very nonjudgmental; and exposure to the divine: school Masses, prayer, the example of the brothers and the staff. These and other things come together as Catholic ethos, Catholic identity, Catholic character.

Jesus at the heart

The heart of all this is really Jesus – that sums up everything that participants have said at this conference. Each of us is a reflection of who Jesus is in all his different identities. Jesus is many things, and we reflect him in our schools, and in our vocation and identity as educators – first, Jesus as teacher; then Jesus as friend, a person to turn to, a person who cares, a person who doesn't judge, a person who consoles, a person who supports; and Jesus as servant, the One who comes to save us, to serve us, to fulfil our needs, just as educators are servants to their students, to help them be everything that God meant for them to be; and, of course, Jesus as evangelizer, to bring the divine to our students. When we put all this together, we educators are like Jesus, an example to the world of what our students can be, of what we as people of God can be, because ultimately Jesus is an example for us, and not for us only, but for the world at large. This is what we are called to do as Catholic schools: to reflect Jesus. This means Jesus has to be our anchor, that something greater in our lives, that something greater that our schools serve – and that is what makes us different from other schools, what gives us the power to change lives. Everything that is good must be anchored and rooted in something so much more than ourselves, and that is what we give to our students: that sense of something more, in which they are anchored. As Catholic schools, we must reaffirm our understanding that Jesus must be at the centre of what we do.

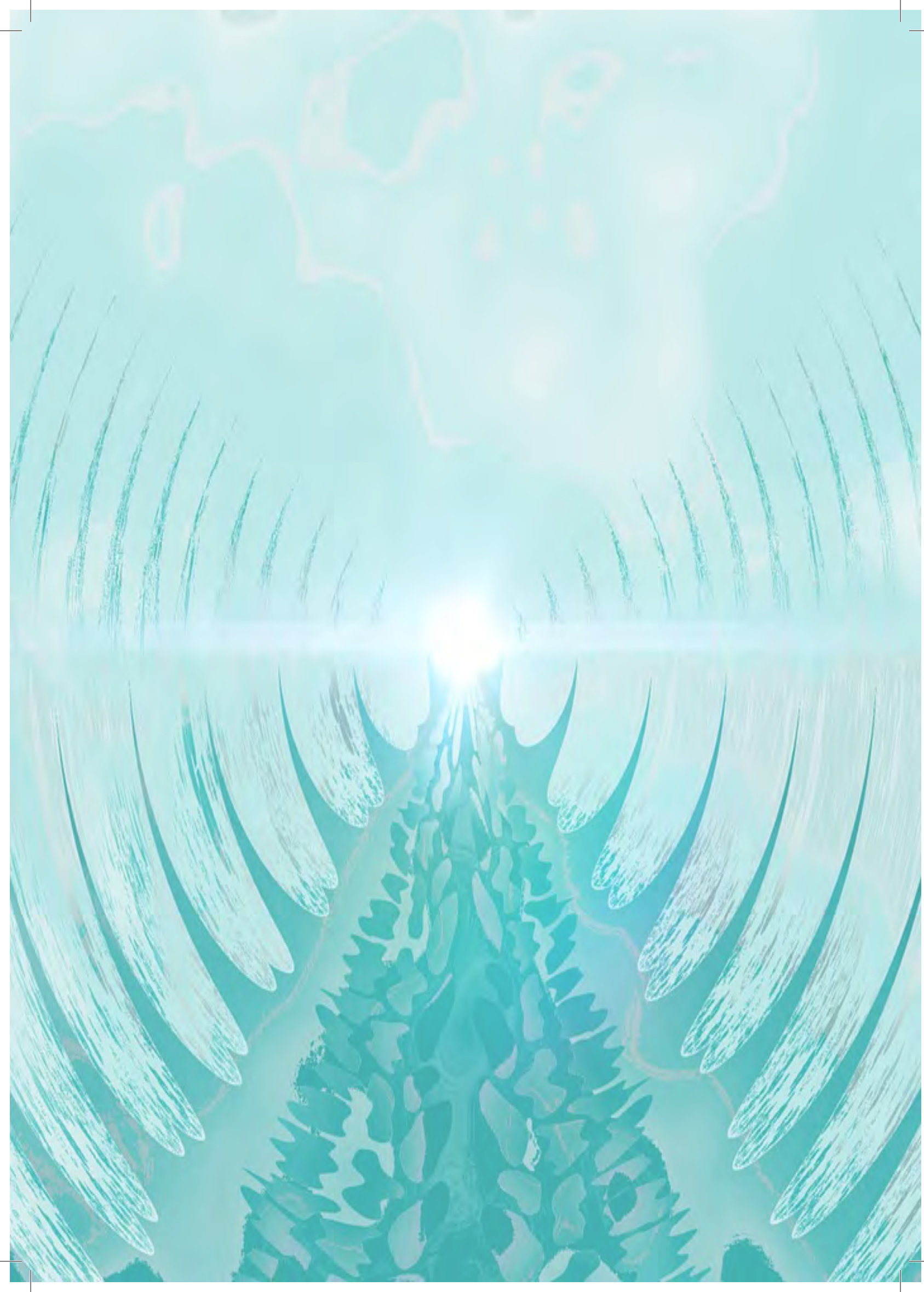
Our Christian identity

We must not be diffident about our Christian identity. Our schools never cross boundaries of what is proper – in fact, if anything, we are too timid about what we stand for, not realizing that in our timidity we do our students a disservice. They choose to come to a Catholic school, but we give them a watered-down Catholic experience. We need to be confident about who we are, about the fact that we add real value. If Jesus is at the centre of what we do, if he is our foundation, then we must mention him as an example to our students, a man who was kind and compassionate, who came to serve us. We don't need people to be Catholic – they may well find God in other ways. It is not for us to tell others to be Catholics, but we need to tell them about Jesus, because he is an example of a life well lived and is the centre of our faith.

Something bigger than ourselves

If we do this well, we develop a much better product. Some people are a joy to work with because they are not in it for themselves only – they are working for something bigger: for God, or for the organization, or for the values or work of the organization. They give of themselves to their work and their colleagues; they are happy to be helpful. We, as Catholic schools, can help to form our students in so holistic a way that this comes naturally. At the heart of this, we do not do this for ourselves, but for others. Therefore we need to bring Jesus into the centre of everything we do, and then all will be well. Sometimes in life, we need one simple overarching and powerful guiding principle – everything revolves around it and falls into place; everything will have a certain cohesion, and it will all make sense.







AC
CS