

# Religious Education in the Catholic Champagnat Marist School

**The mystery is Christ among you,  
your hope of glory: this is the Christ we proclaim,  
this is the wisdom in which we thoroughly train everyone  
and instruct everyone,  
to make them all perfect in Christ.**

(Colossians 1: 27-28)

## 1 Evangelisation: The Mission of the Church

### 1.1 The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is God's saving and life-giving power over all creation. Jesus Christ proclaimed the Kingdom of God through his words and actions. In so doing, Jesus revealed a God who is present in love to all people.

In the Our Father, Catholics pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven". Christians are called to build the Kingdom of God in their own lives and in the world.

### 1.2 Evangelisation

The mission of the Church is evangelisation, that is, to proclaim and live out the Kingdom of God. This is shaped by:

- witness,
- proclaiming the Word,
- celebrating the Sacraments,
- love of our neighbour.

Usually evangelisation is directed towards those who do not know Christ or his Gospel. Today, a 'new evangelisation' is required for people who have lost contact with the parish community or a living sense of the Catholic faith.

Jesus Christ is the foundation of the whole enterprise in a Catholic Marist school. Marist schools work in partnership with families, the parish and the wider Church community as part of its evangelising mission.

Christ is the foundation  
of the whole  
educational enterprise  
of a Catholic school.  
*The Catholic School,*  
# 34.

Evangelisation has two interlinked elements:

- 1) Christian Witness.
- 2) Ministry of the Word.

### 1.2.1 Christian Witness in the Catholic School

Christian Witness is giving witness in society by the way Christian people live. It involves dialogue with people, works of charity, and the promotion of justice. In a Catholic school, all staff by their personal example, their relationships with others, and their pastoral care of students, provide a witness to the presence and action of God in the world.

... students should be able to recognise authentic human qualities in their teachers.  
*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, # 96.

Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.  
*Evangelisation in the Modern World: Evangelii Nuntiandi*, # 41.

Evangelisation... must develop its totality and completely incorporate ... witness and proclamation, word and sacrament, interior change and social transformation. Those who evangelise have a global vision of evangelisation and identify with the overall mission of the Church.  
*General Directory for Catechesis*, # 46.

Following Marcellin Champagnat we seek to be apostles to youth, evangelising through our life and our presence among them as well as through our teaching: neither simply catechists, nor just teachers of secular subjects.  
*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*, # 75.

## 1.2.2 Ministry of the Word

The Ministry of the Word proclaims and explains the Word of God. It includes:

- primary proclamation: an invitation to faith,
- liturgy and the Sacraments,
- catechesis,
- developing an understanding of the Catholic faith,
- **religious education.**

In a Catholic school Religious Education is an aspect of the Ministry of the Word. It seeks to provide knowledge, understanding and engagement with Scripture and the faith Tradition.

## 1.3 Primary Proclamation in the Catholic School

Primary Proclamation is an invitation to faith and a personal relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It is usually addressed to those who have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For students in a Catholic school the invitation to faith may occur in their family, with friends, in school and in their parish.

In the Catholic school, the invitation to faith occurs in multiple experiences such as: classroom prayer, assemblies, Eucharist, school liturgies, retreats and opportunities for solidarity.

For the Church, evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.  
*Evangelisation in the Modern World: Evangelii Nuntiandi, # 18.*

The achievement of this specific aim of the Catholic school depends not so much on subject matter or methodology as on the people who work there. The extent to which the Christian message is transmitted through education depends to a very great extent on the teachers. *The Catholic School, # 43.*

## 1.4 Catechesis in the Catholic School

Catechesis is the process of faith education. Its primary aim is to help those who have accepted the invitation to faith to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Catechesis in the context of a Catholic school includes classroom prayer, school liturgies, Eucharist, sacramental celebrations, community service, retreats and classroom Religious Education.

## 1.5 Religious Education in the Catholic School

The aim of Religious Education in a Catholic school is to enable students to know, understand and appreciate what the Catholic Church believes and teaches and the ways the Church celebrates, lives and prays, and to teach them how to respond freely to God's gift of faith.

Religious Education and catechesis in a Catholic school are distinct yet complementary. It is distinct in that Religious Education unlike catechesis does not assume faith on the part of the student. Religious education is complementary to catechesis in that it seeks to engage with contemporary culture and to relate with other areas of knowledge. It endeavours to help students to integrate faith, culture and life.

The distinction between religious education and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education.

*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, # 69.*

The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the Church; it is based on an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony. Through it, the local Church evangelises, educates, and contributes to the formation of a healthy and morally sound life-style among its members.

*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, # 34.*

Religious education in school [is] a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge.

*General Directory for Catechesis, # 73.*

## 1.6 The Champagnat Marist School: An education enlightened by faith

The Marist School is a centre of learning, of life, and of evangelisation. It seeks to lead its students:

- to learn to know,
- to be competent,
- to live together,
- to grow as persons.

(UNESCO, 1996. *Learning: The treasure within*, p. 105).

It aims to provide a community setting in which faith, hope and love are lived and communicated, and in which students are progressively assisted in their life-long challenge to harmonise faith, life and culture.

At the heart of our school curriculum is a programme of religious education which is comprehensive, systematic and conforms to the Church's guidelines.

*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, # 114.*

The work of promoting human growth is integral to the process of evangelisation. In promoting Gospel values, all Marist educators contribute to the mission of every Marist school to build God's Reign on earth. But we go further... we present Jesus to the young as a real person they can come to know, love, and follow.

*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, # 70-71.*

We lead those who are Christian to deepen their encounter with Jesus Christ. We share how he is the ultimate source of new life, new hope, and new energy for us personally and for all of humankind. We encourage their growth as disciples of Jesus in their experience of the gifts of joy, peace of spirit and overcoming of fear.

*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, # 85.*

We pay attention to the religious environment of the school in terms of, for example, images, daily prayers, and sacred spaces. We encourage expression of our Christian vision of humanity, the world and God in contemporary language and symbols, especially through the creative arts.

*In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, # 147.*

## 1.7 New Evangelisation: New ways to engage

In the context of the Marist school, New Evangelisation seeks to proclaim the Kingdom of God in ways that are both faithful to the Tradition and that engages with contemporary culture. This requires attentiveness to the deep questions that students have. It also requires a continual evaluation of existing strategies and to find new methods, symbols and language, that are meaningful to, and effective with, students.

Look to the future with commitment to a New Evangelisation, one that is new in its ardour, new in its methods, and new in its means of expression.  
(John Paul II to Bishops of Latin America, Haiti).

There is a need for New Evangelisation strategies for Catholics for whom the Tradition has become drained of meaning.

*The Mission of the Redeemer: Redemptoris Missio, # 33.*

We shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new programme”. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with the shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium.

But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.

*At the Beginning of the New Millennium: Novo Millennio Ineunte, # 20.*

