

Section 2



Religious Education and the Catholic School

‘The Catholic school participates in the evangelising mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out.’

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, n.11

2.1 The Mission: Evangelisation

The Catholic school shares the Church's mission of evangelisation; that is, to proclaim and spread the Gospel throughout the world so that humanity might be renewed and transformed. Its approach is comprehensive: 'witness and proclamation, word and sacrament, interior change and social transformation' (GDC n. 46). Exercised in a spirit of cooperation, several complementary roles directly serve the mission of the Catholic school.

Parents, as the first teachers of their children, retain prime responsibility for fostering their growth, by word and example, in faith and Christian living.

'Before all others, parents are bound to form their children, by word and example, in faith and in Christian living.'

Can. 774 #2, Code of Canon Law



The bishop is responsible for ensuring that the content of Revelation as given to us by Christ is faithfully handed down and explained throughout the schools.

'For the particular church entrusted to them, that office (of preaching the Gospel) is exercised by individual bishops, who are the moderators of the entire ministry of the Word in their churches...'
Can. 756 #2, Code of Canon Law



The local pastor, who has responsibility for the proclamation of the Word of God, ensures that the Religious Education policy is implemented in the school community in conformity with the Religious Education guidelines established for the diocese.

‘The parish priest has the obligation of ensuring that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish...’

Can. 528 #1, Code of Canon Law

The school staff develops programs that are faithful both to the guidelines and to the needs and maturity of the students.

‘Since they share the Church’s mission, all Christ’s faithful have the right to promote and support apostolic action, by their own initiative, undertaken according to their state and condition.’

Can. 216, Code of Canon Law



‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

Luke 4:18-19

2.2 Catechesis in the Process of Evangelisation

As an integral part of evangelisation, catechesis is basically a sharing of faith amongst believers; it seeks to develop a faith that has already been called to life by evangelisation, to nurture it to maturity and a fullness of Christian life. This takes place over an individual's lifetime and finds expression within a Christian faith community, particularly within the family and parish.



Catechesis has an important place in Catholic schooling but it must be undertaken with reasonable expectations. Because of the very nature of catechesis, the degree to which the school can successfully catechise depends on the stage of faith commitment of individual students.



In every class, students are at various levels of religious awareness and faith development so the approach to and effectiveness of catechesis will vary from one person and situation to the next.



Evangelisation and catechesis take place within the total life of the school as well as within the formal, classroom-centred programs.

Both are most obviously experienced in:

- school and class liturgies and prayers;
- retreats and reflection days;
- the celebration of special events;
- programs that reach out in service to the wider community;
- classroom Religious Education.



2.3 The Purpose of Catholic Religious Education

Religious education is a lifelong process to which Catholic schooling contributes. Its purposes are:

1. to foster within each individual a growing understanding of and relationship with God;
2. to help individuals to understand themselves and their Catholic faith tradition and to have an appreciation of the faith traditions of others;
3. to enable individuals to participate fully in the life of the Catholic community;
4. to heighten each individual's commitment to bringing the light of their faith to a discerning encounter with the surrounding culture and thus working towards its transformation.



The Catholic school, through its defining culture, its curriculum and its classroom-based Religious Education programs, contributes to the achievement of these purposes. In so doing it seeks to:



- develop an appreciation of the love of God, the wonders of God's creation and the dignity of the human person;
- promote growth in self-knowledge and in knowledge of the life, faith tradition and mission of the Catholic Church;
- increase understanding of religion generally and of different religious ways of seeing reality;
- foster skills of reflection, discernment, critical thinking, judging and deciding how to act in accordance with conscience;
- develop the capacity to critique the surrounding culture in the light of the Catholic Faith and Tradition.

2.4 Classroom Religious Education

Classroom-based programs provide a systematic and comprehensive form of religious education. They emphasise what is often referred to as the instructional aspect of education; they have their own syllabus and incorporate the various teaching and learning processes that characterise other contemporary classroom programs.

While Religious Education teachers witness to and present the Christian message, they cannot presuppose an initial faith in their students. What they can do is foster an understanding of the teachings of the Gospel, the nature of Christianity and the way Catholics are called to live their lives within the



Catholic tradition. Hopefully, this deeper understanding will promote genuine faith development. Teachers are encouraged to take Jesus as their model. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-8), Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near despite the varying conditions affecting growth.

As religious educators, teachers use a wide range of educational strategies to encourage the learner to reflect on self, the world and God in the light of personal experience, sacred Scripture and Tradition. In so doing they seek to cultivate reflection, discernment, decision-making and action, and to nurture the development of an informed conscience.

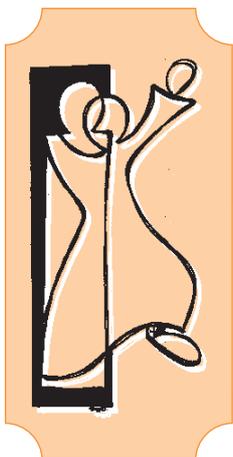
While Religious Education in the classroom has a prime focus on knowledge, this knowledge must be understood in its broadest sense; it should not be equated simply with the retention of pieces of information.

'I have been convinced for some time that the "learning outcome" of Christian religious education should be more than what the western world typically means by "knowledge"; that it is to engage the whole "being" of people, their heads, hearts and life-styles, and is to inform, form and transform their identity and agency in the world.'

Thomas H. Groome, Sharing Faith, p. 2

Authentic Religious Education extends and deepens a student's way of knowing. The acquired knowledge is relevant and significant and is internalised as a result of a genuine educational process.

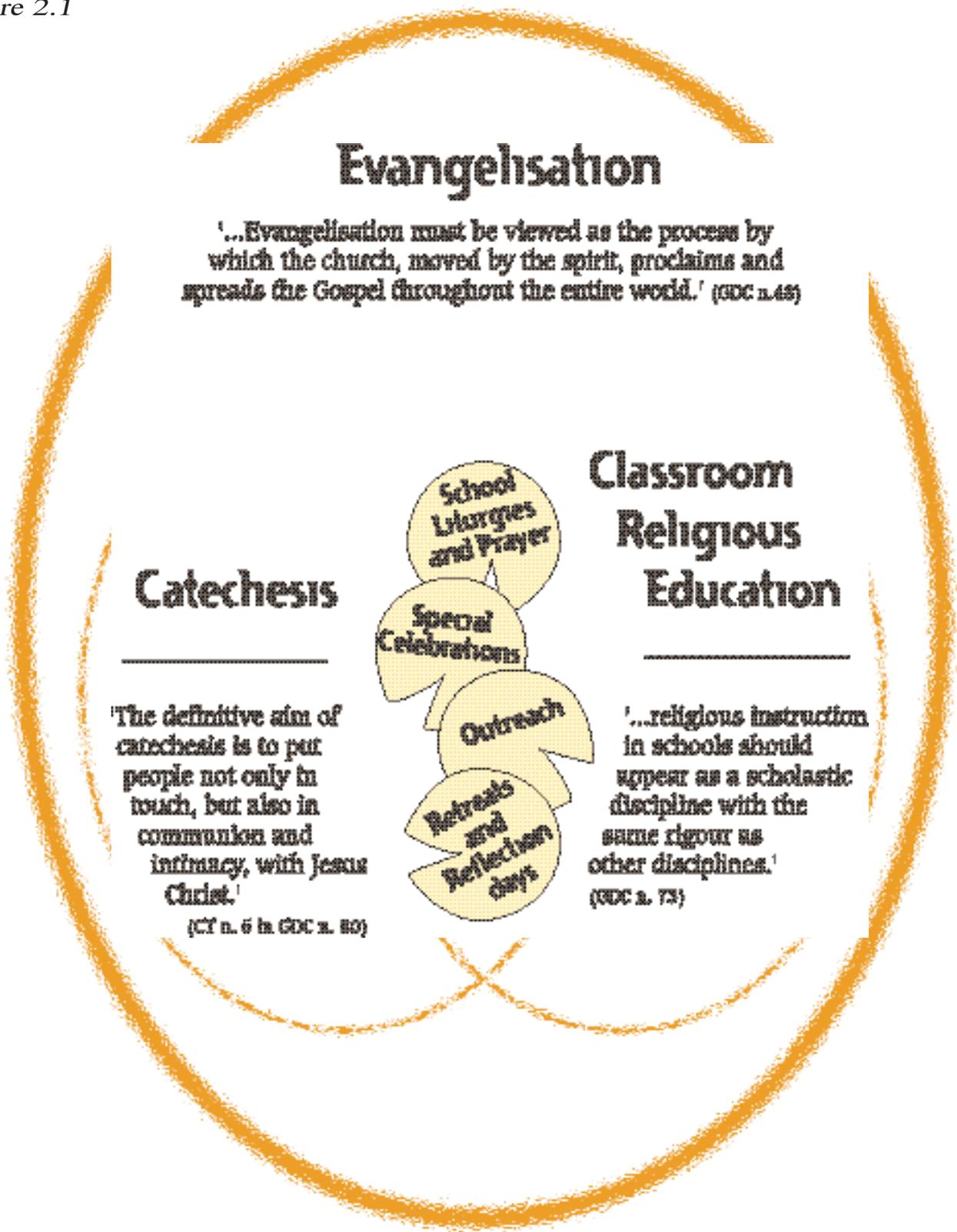
The Catholic school's core purpose is unashamedly religious. Through the total cultural experience it offers, it shares in the Church's work of evangelisation, it provides those elements of catechesis that are appropriate to individual students, and it teaches Catholic beliefs and practices in a systematic fashion in programs of classroom-based Religious Education.



Has your understanding of the distinction between catechesis and classroom-based Religious Education changed over the years? In what ways?

Distinct yet Complementary

Figure 2.1



2.5 Community and Partnership

The Catholic school does not function in isolation; it is part of the wider Church community.

'...this ecclesial dimension (of the Catholic school) is not a mere adjunct but a proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission.'

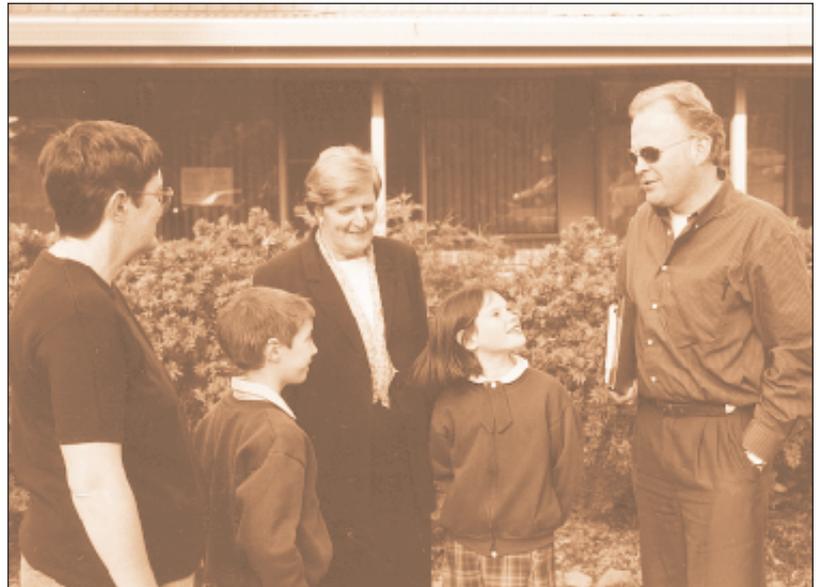
(The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, n. 11)

In this context, the tasks of evangelisation, catechesis and religious education are shared by home, parish and school, with each having its own distinct contribution to make in a sense of genuine partnership.

The home is a domestic faith community where humanity is nurtured and the love of God first experienced.

The Catholic school is an educating community where the learner is given both formal and informal opportunities to grow in wisdom and faith.

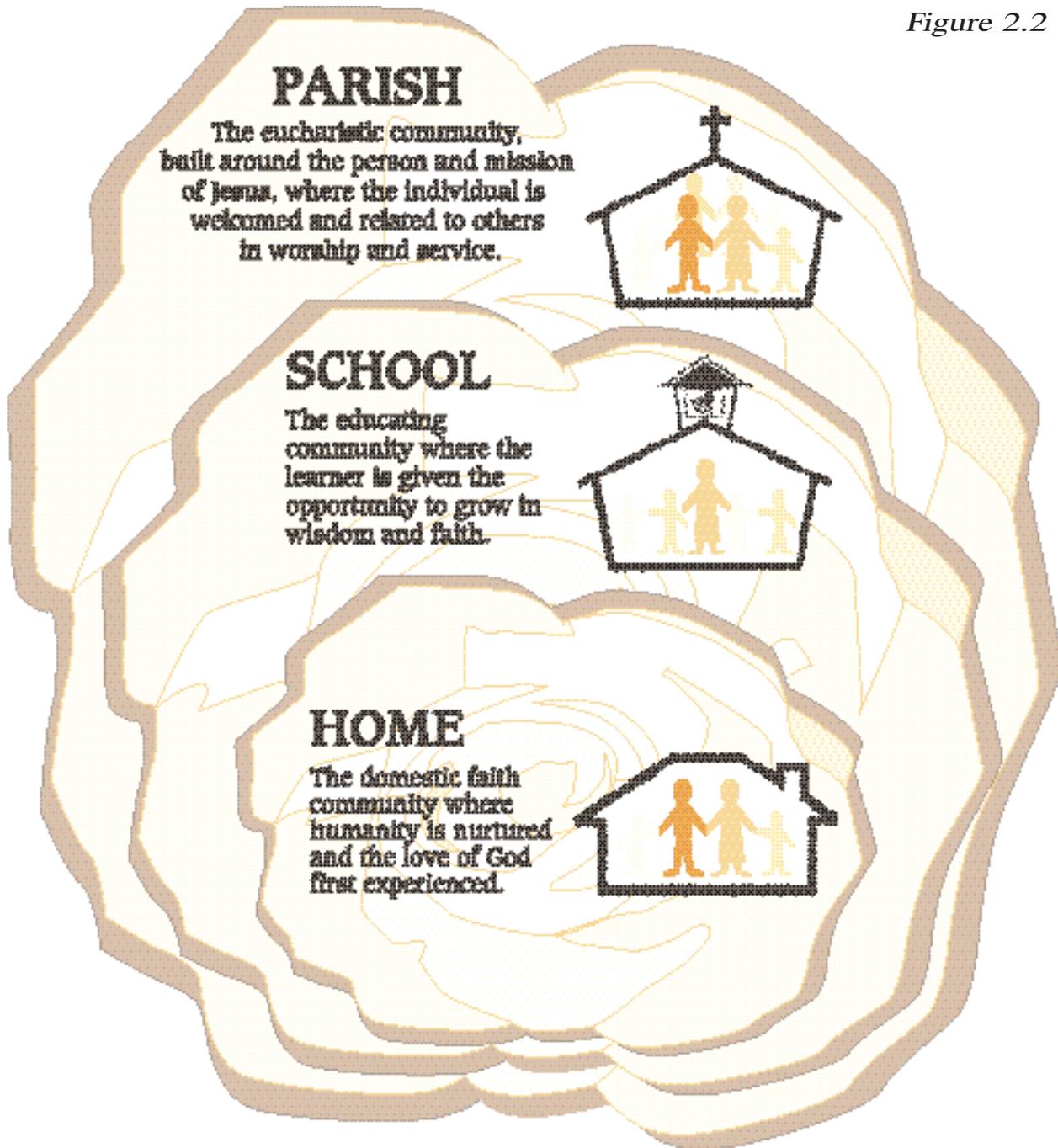
The parish is a Eucharistic community where people are welcomed and related to others in worship and service.



All three are called to partnership based on a common vision.

Partnership in Faith

Figure 2.2



'... be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.'

Philippians 2:2

An example of active partnership is seen in developments around the preparation of children for celebrating the Sacraments. The parents, as the children's first and principal educators, provide an introduction to the Sacraments by word and example.



The parish supports the home by providing a more systematic catechesis through parish-based/ family-centred programs of sacramental preparation.

The school complements these endeavours by focusing on particular sacramental celebrations, and by including a systematic study of the Sacraments in its Religious Education program.

'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.'

I Corinthians 12: 4-7

2.6 The Culture of the Catholic School

The Catholic school responds to its mission by offering a particular cultural experience that is grounded in ‘...a Christian view of the world, of culture and of history’. (CSTTM n. 14)

This translates into a Christ-centred orientation that permeates all aspects of school life including relationships, structures, celebrations and routines, as well as the formal curriculum.



It is reasonable to expect that a school embedded in this Catholic worldview will display certain fundamental and distinguishing characteristics. These should include commitment to:

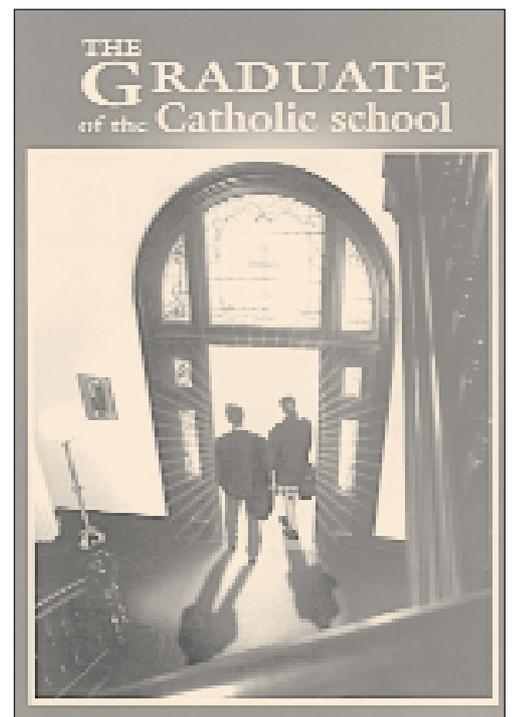
- being grounded in the local Christian community that is centred on the person of Jesus and guided by gospel values
- a fostering of the total development of all its students
- participating in the evangelising mission of the Church
- assisting students to integrate their faith, their culture and their experiences of life
- displaying a fundamental option for the poor and the weak
- offering a service to individuals, society and the wider culture
- transforming society, hastening the kingdom which Jesus announced.



In summary, the Catholic school provides a curriculum, indeed a total cultural experience, within which students have opportunities to hear the Good News and to respond to the person and message of Jesus.

The CEO publication *The Graduate of the Catholic School* describes the competencies, attitudes, values and behaviours seen as desirable in those educated in a Catholic school. Its focus is on:

- religious faith and development
- personal integration
- life skills and intellectual competency
- social responsibility.



'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?'

Micah 6:8

2.7 Religious Education and Other Curriculum Areas

Every curriculum area or subject that is taught within a Catholic school has a religious dimension, a capacity to assist students to examine the world of human culture and the world of religion, providing knowledge and skills, and fostering attitudes and values that are life-giving and that assist young people to search for meaning and truth.



Individual curriculum areas contribute to the religious aims of the Catholic school when they foster:

- skills such as reflection, critical thinking, problem solving, analysis and discernment – all of which promote the search for truth and meaning
- a moral sensitivity and a heightened capacity to distinguish between what is life-giving and what is dehumanising
- the gospel values of love, compassion, reconciliation, transformation, justice and hope
- a generosity of spirit that calls forth a commitment to the service of others and of creation generally
- the capacity to shine the light of faith on the surrounding culture - to reflect, to judge and to choose.



This challenges leaders in Catholic schools to consider innovative approaches to curriculum development whereby teachers can be helped to explore the religious dimension of each area in relation to its own operation and to the curriculum as a whole.



- What is the essence and purpose of each curriculum area?
- What contribution does each one make to the development of the student?
- How can core gospel values transform it?
- How can it be linked to other curriculum areas and, especially, to Religious Education?
- How can this approach lead to a truly integrated curriculum?

'The various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained, but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered.'

The Catholic School n 39

Valuable Across-Curriculum Resources

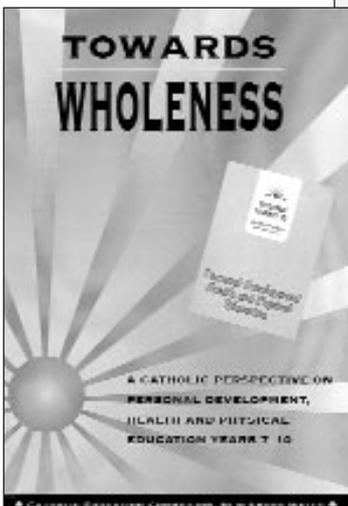
The following documents assist teachers, across a range of learning areas, to integrate faith and life, religion and culture.



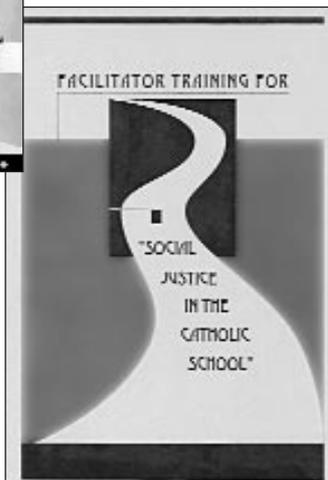
Produced by CEO, Archdiocese of Sydney, to provide practical assistance to secondary curriculum co-ordinators and teachers seeking to integrate values education across a number of curriculum areas.



Produced by CEO, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, to provide a simple strategy and practical resources to assist teachers in teaching about a range of contemporary and sensitive issues from a Catholic perspective.



Produced by the NSW Catholic Education Commission to support the implementation of the PD/H/PE syllabus in Catholic schools.



Produced by CEO, Diocese of Parramatta, to assist teachers raise awareness and deal productively with social justice issues.

2.8 Religious Education in Context

Figure 2.3

