**Why is it important for Teachers to learn about Catholic Social Teaching?**

**Background Information:**

**Impact of Secularisation on Faith formation of our students and staff:**

The first of the challenges addressed through this Professional Learning Program is the secularisation of society. “The scope of the role of Faith Leader continues to expand at a challenging time for the Roman Catholic Church, with declining Mass attendance, families not practicing their Faith yet sending their children to a Catholic school, and other examples of disconnectedness with Parish life” (Reikoff, 2014, p.31). Furthermore, the current generation of teachers and the parents of students today have been formed in their Faith during a time where Religious Education equated more closely with post-Christian “values based education” (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2009, p.5). According to studies by D’Antionio et.al (2007, reported in Rymarz, 2013) “the most disconnected and uncommitted Catholics are those born after 1979, the so-called millennials” (p.19). These Catholics are a “product of a less dogmatic, more ecumenical Religious Education following Vatican 11”...and are therefore “ weak in their foundational theological formation”(Grace and O’Keef, 2007; Hoge et.al., 2001; Jacobs, 1996; Miller, 2006; USCCB, 2005 in Schutloffel, 2013, p.96). Catholic school staff of this generation “are unsure of Catholic identity; are increasingly less confident about leading prayer; seem reluctant to invest in Faith study and more often than not they do not feel they need to participate in Parish life” (Neidhart and Lamb, 2013, p.74). Teachers of this generation are less confident to teach Religious Education with any credibility and therefore more reluctant to engage with Religious and Faith Education in any depth, as they lack the knowledge, skills and attitudes to take up the challenge of Faith Leadership in the Catholic school” (Neidhart and Lamb, 2013, p.74).

The families of today’s students may be also less inclined to engage with a more formal Faith commitment because it is not their experience from their own Faith formation. “Students enrolling in Catholic schools do not come from families where Faith nurturing and sponsorship is occurring” (Rymarz, 2013, p.19). Spesia’s (2016b) study into the nurturing of New Evangelisation in schools found

There is a real importance of providing ongoing Faith formation or evangelizing opportunities to connect parents and families more deeply with the Catholic Faith of the school community. …Evangelisation really needs to be directed to the family—that’s where the Faith used to be handed down, and there’s a generation gap. We need to help these families form their children in the Faith (Spesia, 2016b, p. 275).

Students are also less inclined to engage with a traditional Catholic doctrinal approach to curriculum as they may see it as irrelevant to their life. “Popular spirituality views Religion as an empty husk or shell, which contains nothing more than vain men and institutional authority” (Tacey, 2003, p.9). Young people today have a desire and interest in spirituality, but do not equate spirituality necessarily with Religion (Mackay, 2016). They have interests in social justice and environmental issues but again do not necessarily make the connection to Religion (Mackay, 2016). “Today they [youth] would rather get to Faith by spirituality and personal experience” (Tacey, 2003, p.4). The challenge for Faith educators is to help students make these connections between the beliefs and teachings of the Church to those beliefs and issues of relevance and interest to themselves. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Guadium* exhorts the Church to do just this. “We Must Be a Church on a Mission– we cannot stand still; we need to move forward…We need to engage the world, not separate from it… It is important for the message we preach to be attractive to people” (Pope Francis in Paprocki, 2013, p.1).

**Impact of a crowded curriculum and drive for academic success**:

A second challenge Faith Leaders face is that in the drive for academic and secular excellence, Faith formation and Religious Education often get pushed to the periphery. “It is widely recognised and accepted that in the last 20 years the educational environment in Catholic schools has altered significantly, owing to a variety of factors but including external influences, the increased attention given to target setting and performance based accountability” (Coll, 2009, p.200). “It is entirely possible to be a high-performing Catholic school on other measures (e.g.academic performance or football trophies), while paying little heed to essential Faith learning outcomes*”* (Shuttloffel, 2016, p.183). Principals reported the Religious dimension of Catholic schools was being marginalised by the pressure for academic success (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2001 in Belmonte and Cranston, 2009 p. 297).This puts schools “in danger of losing their Catholic identity in this minimisation of the Religious and Spiritual curriculum” (Grace, 2013). While Church Cannon documents state that directors of Catholic Schools should ensure “the [instruction](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/AC.HTM) which is [given](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/3L.HTM) in them (Catholic schools) is at least as academically [distinguished](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/1/2H.HTM) as that in the other [schools](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/E9.HTM) of the [area](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/1/AU.HTM)” (Code of Cannon Law, 1983, 806 §[2](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/F.HTM)), there is the dual tension between the mission of a Catholic school to form the Faith of students, staff and families at the school and the emphasis on a strong academic program. The latter is required for a Catholic school to attract and retain families in the secular marketplace (Fuller and Johnson, 2014; Gleeson, 2015). If schools are now the main contact with the Church for many families (D’Orsa, 2015; Gleeson, 2015), then attracting and retaining families is vital in order to be able to reach an audience with which to evangelise.

With this drive for academic success, teachers may feel they do not have adequate time in the curriculum to devote to in-depth studies of Religion and Faith. Teachers and school leaders should be cognisant of not “falling into the trap of the academic success culture, putting their school’s Christological focus and its accompanying understanding of the human person in the second place” (Miller, 2006, p.24). Christ should not simply be “fitted in”(Fuller and Johnson,2014, p.98) rather Christ should be seen as “*the* Teacher in Catholic schools” (Miller, 2006, p.24).

The reality for many schools, including the focus school of this paper, is that the full academic agenda, compounded with a lack of confidence by the teacher in their ability and credibility to teach Religious Education due to their own formation, relegates Religion and Faith formation to a token element in the curriculum. Catholic schools are increasingly becoming “private schools characterised as schools of academic excellence and Religious memory” (Earl, 2005 in Spesia, 2016a, p. 257). Catholic School Leaders must prioritise the distinctly Catholic nature of their schools in order to stay true to the Church Mission of New Evangelisation. “Catholic education goes beyond training in skills and the competition for qualifications. It helps individuals to seek wholeness, truth and hope in their lives…promoting a sense of community based on solidarity, the promotion of justice and making a difference” (Miller, 2006; Toohey, 2013 in Gleeson 2015, p.150).

**How can Catholic Social Teaching address these challenges to Faith Education?**

A way to address the challenges presented above is to teach via “a distinctively

Catholic curriculum, which would keep Christ at the centre of pedagogy” (Spesia 2016b, p.287). One way to achieve this is through the incorporation of Catholic Social Teaching Principles into the delivery of the Australian Curriculum. “Religious instruction in schools sows the dynamic seed of the Gospel and seeks to ‘keep in touch with the other elements of the student’s knowledge and education; thus the Gospel will impregnate the mentality of the students in the field of their learning, and the harmonization of their culture will be achieved in the light of faith’” (Congregation for the Clergy, 1998, para. 73 in Spesia, 2016a, p.247).

Pope Francis implores Catholics today to be a “missionary people” (Paproki, 2013). In order to be this, a greater knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching Principles such as stewardship of creation, human dignity, subsidiarity and preferential option for the poor promoted through recent Papal Encyclicals such as *Laudate Si* and *Caritas in Veritate* needs to be at the heart of staff formation and the New Evangelisation. Not only should Catholic Social Teaching Principles be introduced and discussed as part of the curriculum, but meaningful social justice projects should be initiated as a result of these discussions, linking the theory with the action.

A theoretical Catholic Faith does little to provide students with the tangible witness necessary to claim their own Catholic identity. By seeking coherence between actions and behaviours, the meaning associated with being a Catholic Christian becomes a reality rather than an abstract concept. It *means* something to identify as a Catholic Christian (Shuttloffel, 2016, p. 186).

Catholic Social teaching elements can be introduced and explored simultaneously where relevant with the mainstream curriculum, increasing the opportunities for building Faith and Catholic identity without adding to the existing teaching and learning load. With an “emphasis on Faith across the curriculum…Faith can infuse daily classroom life” and strengthen Catholic Identity (Shuttloffel, 2016, p.180).