

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE : Strengthening Our Catholic Identity!

6 / 7 February 2010

Dear Friends

Last Tuesday, Villanova College celebrated its Opening Mass and the induction of Mr Dennis Harvey as the first lay Principal of the College. This coming Tuesday, the Community of St James' School and Parish gather for our Opening Mass.

This is an opportune time as our young people return to school, to reflect on what it is that we, as Catholics, want to pass on to our children. Parents, the first and best of teachers, have the primary responsibility of passing on the Faith as best they can, in many cases in partnership with our Catholic schools.

As many explore the My School website, it is all too easy to gloss over the important differences between schools that can be masked by a few numbers that measure a school's performance on a particular set of tests undertaken by particular groups of students on a particular day. Despite the many protestations to the contrary, many will use the content of this website as a set of 'league tables' for comparing schools.

We need to be passionate about Catholic education, though never to the detriment of other schools, state or private; indeed, every school must try to be the best possible. I believe that our Catholic schools can and do make a difference in the lives of our children and their families. The teaching of St Augustine who was a student, parent and teacher is very profound when it comes to education. There is a 'spirituality' involved in education which, Augustine tells us, is about *educating the heart*. Christ is the Teacher and he dwells in our hearts. Those who teach must remain life-long learners themselves and are better described as 'educators' because they help students discover what is in their hearts – insights you won't find on any website!

Today we face many challenges in Catholic faith formation and I am profoundly aware of the 'gaps' that are evident when children leave school. I suspect that we have entertained unrealistic expectations over the years. Let's be honest! Which of us was 'fully formed' as a Catholic Christian when we finished school?

A massive challenge is to pass on our Catholic culture to our children, that sense of Catholic 'identity' or 'belonging'. Being Catholic won't mean much if we don't feel at home in the Church. For some, the Catholic school may provide the only experience of 'church' that a child or family has. Our Catholic schools need to make a difference.

Both the Church and Australian society are going through radical changes which influence our beliefs, personal security and identity. Most Catholic adults today still have a sense of Catholic identity even though their religious practice may have changed. Whether the next generation will have this strong Catholic identity is in our hands. Parents and Catholic educators have a special responsibility because no one can love what they do not know. Faith formation and Catholic practice are both important.

As a Parish Community, let us pray for our children and their families and teachers, and extend a warm welcome to all, especially when we celebrate together the Family Mass on the fourth Sunday of each month.

Fr Dave