An analysis of Religious Education Coordinators' perceptions of their role in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

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Signature

Abstract

This thesis analysed Religious Education Coordinators' perceptions of their role in Catholic secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Melbourne from 1970 – 2000.

The theoretical framework for the study, which was reported on in this thesis, was drawn from Catholic Church documents on religious education at both international and national levels, and from the work of researchers within the field of religious education. In particular the study investigated the diversity of language used to describe religious education and religious education theory and analysed the significance that this has had in the development of an understanding of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator.

It was argued that there were significant factors in the development of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator that included changes in the understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education during the second half of the twentieth century. In addition there were historical factors peculiar to the Archdiocese of Melbourne that played an important part in the understanding of the RECs role.

Quantitative data in the form of annual survey material (1988-1999) from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne provided a framework for the empirical component of the research. The empirical component involved the interviewing of Religious Education Coordinators from a deliberately selected sample that covered the range of skills and experiences deemed necessary in the research. The purpose was to ascertain from the perspective of the Religious Education Coordinators themselves how they analysed their role. Grounded theory methodology was used as the basis for the inductive analysis of the data that emerged from the in-depth interviews.

Theory that was generated on the role of the Religious Education Coordinator includes: the importance of an understanding of the theoretical dimensions of religious education and the role of the Religious Education Coordinator; an elaboration of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator in the school context and the necessary skills and attributes that are required to meet the challenges in the role; and the complexity of the challenges that are faced by the Religious Education Coordinator.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

<u>General</u>

AST (Advanced Skilled Teacher)

CEO (Catholic Education Office)

CEOM (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne)

EAPI (East Asia Pastoral Institute)

FDC (Faith Development Coordinator)

Guidelines (Guidelines for Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne)

KLA (Key Learning Areas)

PAVCSS (Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools)

POL (Position of Leadership)

POR (Position of Responsibility)

REC (Religious Education Coordinator)

RE (Religious Education)

<u>Documents</u>

AREFTC (Australian Religious Education – Facing the Challenges, 1999)

CS (The Catholic School, 1977)

CSTM (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1998)

CT (Catechesis in Our Time, Catechesi Tradendae, 1979)

GCD (General Catechetical Directory, 1972)

GDC (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997)

GE (Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis,* 1965)

EN (On Evangelization in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* 1976)

LCS (Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982)

RDE (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988)

REF (The Renewal of the Education in Faith, 1970)

WDAU (The Word Dwells Among Us, 1977)

WPJAL (We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord, 1990)

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Chapter One

Contexts for understanding the role of the Religious Education Coordinator

1.1 Introduction

This thesis analyses the development of a particular role within Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne from 1970-2000, that of the Religious Education Coordinator (REC). The role of the REC is a specific leadership role in Australian Catholic schools and it carries the responsibility for leadership and coordination of all aspects of the religious education curriculum. It is a diverse role that has responsibility for those activities that come under the general term 'religious education'.

Religious education in a Catholic school setting in Australia occurs within formal religious education classroom settings, as well as in activities outside the formal classroom, such as, liturgies, retreats, voluntary groups and social justice activities. In conjunction with the school Principal, the REC has specific responsibility for the religious dimension within the school, and for the ongoing development of the Catholic ethos of the school. Consequently, the role of the REC cannot be narrowly defined. It is multi-layered and inclusive of many dimensions. Within this study, when the expression 'role of the REC' is used, it stands for the diverse range of responsibilities and roles that are inherent in the position. The thesis aims to explore the role of the REC from the perspective of the REC, within the context of an understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education.

1.2 The historical context of this thesis

In order to situate the development of the REC's role in a clear context, it is necessary to examine some of the developments that have taken place in the field of religious education, before and during the period with which this study is concerned. Developments in religious education in the areas of theory, curriculum and pedagogy have had a considerable impact upon conceptions of the role of the REC. A primary task of the REC is to coordinate religious education curriculum. Changes in the context of

Catholic schooling and religious education over the past thirty years have influenced the development of the role of the REC. This chapter discusses a range of changes. They include changes within the Catholic Church; changes in teaching approaches in religious education; changes in control of Catholic schools (from control by religious orders to control by lay people); changes in the nature of Catholic schooling; in student numbers attending Catholic schools; and changes in the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEOM).

An overview of these changes is presented in this chapter. This overview provides an important background to role of the REC. Some of the elements in this overview, particularly teaching approaches in religious education and the role of the CEOM will be treated at greater detail later in this thesis.

Changes in the Church

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), 1962-1965, was a historical signpost for change in many areas of Catholic Church life. Vatican II grew out of movements prior to 1962:

> It is unreal to suggest that such a change was born of the Vatican Council. The real seedbed of change that predated the Council by many years is to be found in the various movements within the Church. The biblical, liturgical and theological renewal of the post-war years is relevant for the developments in the education of faith (Duffy, 1972, p. 144).

Vatican II was significant in that it gave authoritative support to these changes that reshaped the place of the Church in the world (Prest, 1997, p. 17) and consequently the place of the Catholic school within the Catholic Church. Catholic schools as agencies of the Catholic Church are influenced by changes that occur within the Church, and therefore Vatican II is an important event to consider in relation to schools.

One of the most significant documents from Vatican II, *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, articulated in a radical way the changed perceptions of the relationship of the Church to the world. Donald R. Campion, SJ (1965) claimed that the most distinctive note of change in relationship to the Church was "the Church putting itself consciously at the service of the family of man [*sic*]". This resulted in the "highly significant step" of "a rethinking of

conventional ecclesiological images" (Campion, p. 185). The previously held theological position, that outside the Church there was no salvation (Gasparri, 1932, pp. 307-319), was replaced in *Gaudium et Spes* with a Church that was in the world:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [*sic*] of this age, especially those of the poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts (Abbott, 1967, par. 1).

On a more general level, one of the most observable changes that emerged from the Council was in the area of Liturgy (the public worship in the Church) with local languages replacing the universal Latin. In Australia, the Church began celebrating the Eucharist in English, the altar was brought closer to the congregation, altar rails were removed and the priest now faced the people. Coinciding with these changes, the increased importance of the role of the laity was observed in such things as the role of lectors during the Eucharist. Equally stark was the change in clothing worn by women and men religious. They discarded their veils and habits for normal everyday wear. These and many other outward changes signified much internal change (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 17) within the Church and within the Church's understanding of religious education.

One of the changes that flowed from Vatican II was an increased emphasis on religious education in Government schools. Marie Kehoe, Principal of the Catholic Teachers' College in Melbourne, argued that the description by Vatican II that the Church was the People of God (*Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, pars. 9-17) had the effect of:

> …broadening the scope of the deliberations of the Australian Catholic Church from what could have been a pre-occupation with formal schooling in the Catholic sector, to a concern for all Catholic children whether in Catholic or in government schools (Kehoe, 1982, p. 97).

Responding to the changes emanating from Vatican II, the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEOM) embarked upon the provision of religious education teaching materials for Catholic students in Government schools. The CEOM also commenced specialist training for those who were going to use these materials. The Church and its activities in religious education were changed as a result of Vatican II.

Changes in teaching approaches in religious education

Religious education in Catholic schools at the time of this research is a result of a range of changes in approaches to religious education that have occurred in the past fifty years. Until the 1960s, religious education in Australian schools was structured around the Catechism. Catechisms contained questions and answers on important items of Catholic knowledge, belief and practice. Students learnt the answers by rote. Book Two of the *Catholic Catechism* (Australian Hierarchy, 1963)*,* issued and prescribed for use in Catholic Schools in Australia, contained 180 questions and answers. Question 83 in the chapter on Baptism asks, "What did Baptism do to you?" The answer provided is: "Baptism removed original sin by giving me the life of grace. It made me God's child and a member of His [*sic*] Church." The aim of this doctrinal approach to religious education was to ensure that students memorised the body of doctrine that was central to the Catholic tradition. It assumed that rote learning of the doctrinal content would lead students to understanding, belief and practice of the Catholic tradition.

A change in approach occurred in the mid-1960s. The kerygmatic approach to religious education, based on the proclamation of the message of salvation as found in Scripture became popular (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 40). In the Archdiocese of Melbourne the kerygmatic approach was most clearly expressed in the series *My Way to God*. The teacher's book to accompany Book One states: "This book is not in catechism form; it is rather a story, *the* story, God's own story. It is a true story, the story of God's plan of salvation" that is contained in Scripture (Australian Bishops' Committee for Education, 1964, p. 3). As well as a change in the content of religious education, this approach heralded a change in the methodology of religious education:

> In using this book the teacher has to set her face against the temptation to think that learning a large number of things by rote is education… it would be fatal to the whole purpose and spirit of the book to have the sections learnt by rote. The children know the stories they have been told, the fairy stories, "Red Riding Hood" and the rest, without learning them by rote; they do not need to learn them by rote. So, too, they will know God's own story of His loving salvation, and will know the various parts of it, the main events in the life of Jesus, some of his miracles, without learning them by rote (Australian Bishops' Committee for Education, 1964, p. 40).

Following Vatican II, the doctrinal and kerygmatic approaches were replaced by life-centred, experiential catechesis. The starting point of this approach to religious education was neither the authoritarian reproduction of doctrine of the Catechism, nor the humanly conceptual approach of the kerygma, but the lived experiences of those being educated (Welbourne, 1995, p. 4). This reform in religious education was a response "to the Second Vatican Council's ideas about divine revelation" where it was argued "that God was present and working in the lives of people now" (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 41). The 1974 *Guidelines for Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (*Guidelines*) incorporated the life-centred approach. The *Guidelines* for Form 1 (Year 7) were called "Being a Christian" and they were structured around four themes: My World Has New Horizons; Growth and Witness; Responsibility in Today's World; Relationships. Directions to teachers in the introduction to these *Guidelines* point to an understanding of revelation that invites students to find God in life:

> The outlining of this course is an attempt to throw open various topics which will enable both pupils and teacher to be involved in a pleasing and joyful discovery of God's invitation to share in his life and love (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1974, p. 2)

These themes within the *Guidelines* dealt primarily with people's lives and the relationship of people to each other and the world. They reflect the interpretation of revelation that emerged from Vatican II.

Changes to the content and methodology of religious education that followed Vatican II were not without their critics. Many members of the Catholic communities, including teachers in Catholic schools and people in parishes, became confused and/or hostile over changes in religious education in schools. The late 1960s and early 1970s was a time of debate and division within the Australian Church, and religious education was often at its centre. In a history of Catholic education in Victoria from 1963 to 1980, O'Brien (1999, pp. 63-65) analysed this division and controversy. O'Brien explained that much of the debate that had been simmering about religious education reached a crisis point with the publication of *Come Alive*, a new religious education magazine series for Year Eleven students. *Come Alive* epitomised the life-centred and experiential approach and was a dramatic change from the previous religious education material. The extent and heat of the controversy was such that Archbishop Knox of Melbourne, who strongly supported the changes, become embroiled in a public debate about the merits of these new approaches to religious education. He clashed with Bishop Stewart of

Sandhurst, who was a virulent and public critic of the changes (O'Brien, 1999, p. 62). Understandably members of the Catholic community, and the community in general, were confused when these divisions on religious education and theology between Catholic Church leaders became a matter of public debate.

The confusion and division over religious education escalated further with a debate about the future of the Catholic school system. The religious education and Catholic schooling debates received prominence when the Director of the Catholic Education Office, Fr Patrick Crudden, spoke out on both these issues. Crudden expressed strong views about the future direction of Catholic schools. He pointed out that Catholic schools could no longer cater for all Catholic children who wanted to attend them. In light of this fact, Crudden asked whether the Catholic Church should continue to devote its resources to Catholic schooling or should direct them to other areas. Crudden proposed that government sponsored education was more than adequate for all children, and that the Catholic Church should withdraw from Catholic schooling and use its resources elsewhere (O'Brien, 1999, pp. 61-68; Crudden, 1972, pp. 41-57). Because of these assertions, expressed publicly, his position as Director of the Catholic Education Office was untenable and he was dismissed. A prominent Melbourne Catholic academic, R.J.W. Selleck, wrote an insightful work on the man at the centre of this public division: *Crudden – The Reluctant Rebel*. In this work Selleck detailed the events that led to Fr Crudden's dismissal in 1970. Selleck concluded:

> The questions Fr Crudden asked about the administration of Catholic education and its catechetical methods, questions of great importance, remain. Before his dismissal there were signs that answers were being earnestly sought … Fr Crudden's dismissal does not mean that this hope is ended, but it illustrates the difficulties of frank discussion (Selleck, 1970, p. 47).

The next phase of religious education was in the 1980s. This period can be characterised as the development of religious education curriculum on more educational grounds. The work of international researchers (Moran 1966a, 1966b, 1971, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1989; Groome 1980, 1991, 1992, 1998, 1999; Boys 1982, 1989; Goldman 1965; Grimmitt 1973; Smart 1973, 1975), and Australian scholars (Rummery 1970, 1975, 1977a, 1977b, 1978a, 1978b, 1980, 1982a, 1982b, 2001; Rossiter 1981, 1983, 1987a, 1987b; Malone 1982, 1984, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Lovat 1989, 1991, 1995, 1998; Moore & Habel 1982), has drawn attention to the necessity to bring developments in education and related disciplines of psychology and sociology to religious education. One of the

major results of their work has been the development of a language for religious education that aims at balancing the terms 'religious' and 'education'. Various theories of religious education have favoured one or other of these terms, or a combination of both. These researchers have argued that the religious education activity that takes place in the formal religious education classroom must be grounded in educational principles. Religious education curricula from various Catholic Education Offices reflect these educational insights. Their work will be examined in greater depth in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Change from religious order control to lay control

Contemporaneous with the debate about the most suitable approaches to religious education, and whether the Catholic school system could or should survive, was the dramatic change of personnel within Catholic schools. Many congregations of vowed women and men religious responded to the call of the Vatican Council for *aggiornamento* (renewal) by examining their commitment to Catholic schools in the light of the charism of the particular founder of their order. As a consequence, many ventured into alternative ministries by moving out of teaching in schools and becoming involved in religious education in Government schools, in social justice activities and in working with the poor and disadvantaged. Other religious, in the wake of the turmoil of those years, left vowed religious life altogether. As a result of both of these developments, the number of vowed religious staff in Catholic schools declined and the gap had to be filled by lay Catholic teachers. A report by the CEOM on *The Role and Status of Lay Teachers* stated that in 1948 "religious teachers comprised 84% of full-time staff" (Kelly & Rogan, 1974, p. 8). In research later that year, Rogan claimed that changing staff patterns had an "enormous impact on Catholic education" (Rogan, 1974, p. 12). He recorded that 1970 was the first year in which lay teachers in Victorian Catholic schools outnumbered the members of religious congregations. Four years later in 1974, 71% of the total teaching force were lay teachers. The figures in Victoria were comparable to those in New South Wales (with the largest state teaching population in Australia). In NSW in the period 1965-1970, the percentage of vowed religious personnel in Catholic primary schools dropped from 69.1% to 50.7% and in Catholic secondary schools from 77.4% to 54.4% (Bourke, 1972, p. 14).

The decline in numbers of religious personnel was in itself significant, but was made even more significant as it coincided with the perceived low status of lay

teachers in Catholic schools, and the generally poor religious education training most lay teachers received at the time. In describing the role of lay teachers prior to Vatican II, Kelly and Rogan wrote:

> There was no thought given to the lay teacher's role in religious education; it was taken for granted that this was the preserve of the religious teachers. Furthermore, in the days before the Second Vatican Council the lay teacher was often regarded as second best to the religious teacher (Kelly & Rogan, 1974, p. 10).

Because the staffing of Catholic schools had for so long been in the hands of the religious orders no plans had been made for the inclusion and training of lay staff in Catholic schools. The changing situation in the 1960s and 1970s called for a planned approach to preparing lay teachers to assume an important role in Catholic schools.

Changes in Catholic schooling

It has been argued (O'Brien 1999; Praetz 1980; O'Farrell 1977) that in the late 1960s and early 1970s the Catholic school system was in a state of crisis. In 1972, in response to this state of affairs, a *National Symposium of Catholic Education* was held in Melbourne. Among the many urgent questions addressed at the Symposium were: Should the Catholic Church in Australia continue to provide a schooling system? Does the Second Vatican Council say anything useful on education? How is 'religion' being taught these days? Papers were presented by participants which included key figures in the Australian Church, religious orders, academics and educationalists. Papers at the Symposium were edited by Gill (1972) in a book whose title captures the degree of concern of the time *Catholic Education. Where Is It Going?*

At the Symposium, Monsignor James Bourke, Director of the Federal Catholic Education Office, referred to the decrease in the number of members of religious orders and the difficulties presented by this situation (Gill, 1972, p. 3). Fr Patrick Crudden, recently dismissed as Director of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, stated, "The day has come in Australian when the Church can no longer afford to carry the weight of its schools" (Gill, 1972, p. 47). Sister Jordan, a Mercy nun and senior lecturer in education at the University of Adelaide, pointed to the numbers of Catholic children in Government schools (320,000) and conceded that the Catholic school system could not offer places to all who sought them (Gill, 1972, p. 97). She referred to the increased numbers of lay teachers, and observed that the perception was

that "lay teachers are not seen as equals" to the religious staff in schools (Gill, 1972, p. 103). There were many other voices as well. They gathered, nevertheless with a sense of hope, as Gill himself writes in the introduction, "in the belief that the 'authorities' mean what they say, that decisions should be strongly influenced by the preceding debate" (Gill, 1972, p. x). The symposium highlighted the enormous changes that were occurring in Catholic education at this time, changes that have significantly influenced Catholic schooling and religious education since then.

Changes in student numbers in Catholic schools

The steep rise in the number of children born after the Second World War, combined with the influx of migrant children presenting themselves for school, meant that the Catholic education sector faced difficulties with the provision of schools, classrooms and staff. The extent of this growth is captured in Tables 1.1 and 1.2. Pupil numbers from the four Victorian Dioceses are represented.

Table 1.1 Number of students in Catholic primary schools 1950-1982

Pupil numbers – Primary Schools 1950-1982					
	Melbourne	Ballarat	Sandhurst	Sale	Total
1950	34,413	5,292	3,746	1,945	45,396
1982	76,957	8,431	7,649	5,864	98,946

Source: Martin (1995, p.67).

Table 1.2 Number of students in Catholic secondary schools 1950-1982

Pupil numbers – Secondary Schools 1950-1982					
	Melbourne	Ballarat	Sandhurst	Sale	Total
1950	12,808	1,933	1,494	662	16,897
1982	52,066	6,297	5,206	4,001	67,570

Source: Martin (1995, p. 67).

Changes within the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne

Bishops returning from the Second Vatican Council were instructed to write guidelines that reflected the pastoral initiatives, teachings and reforms that had been agreed upon at the Council. In response, in 1970 the Australian Bishops' Episcopal Conference published *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (REF)*, a translation of a document that had been prepared by the Italian Bishops' conference for the Italian Church. The translation contained a brief supplement that endeavoured to situate this Roman document in an Australian context.

The REF "had particular significance for, and influence upon, Australian Catholic Schools" (Ryan, 1997, p. 167). Until its publication there was no document that provided adequate Australian religious education guidelines for the production of religious education curricula in Catholic schools and this was seen as a "critical deficiency" (Ryan, 1997, p. 168). As Malone (1992a, p. 70) has pointed out, the REF, along with the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), became the source of the concepts developed in the 1970s *Guidelines* in Melbourne and for Sydney in the 1980s.

The REF became a document that could be used to provide a justification of the new methods of religious education in the midst of this growing turmoil within the Catholic community. The REF was extensively quoted in the religious education guidelines that were produced in this period: "The bases of the guidelines are the Renewal of the Education of Faith, the General Catechetical Directory and the directives of the Australian Episcopal Conference" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1974, p. 2). The REF introduced new language about religious education. In paragraphs 25-26 and 30-31 the REF used the terms 'evangelisation', 'pre-evangelisation', 'catechesis' and 'pre-catechesis' to describe aspects of the educational mission of the Church. These Catholic theological terms were applied to educational contexts and gave rise to the new description of religious education as "education in faith". The methodology embodied in the REF was twofold:

> The fundamental law of all catechetical method is that of fidelity
> to the Word of God and fidelity to the concrete needs of the
> faithful. This is the ultimate criterion by which catechists must
> appraise their work as educators. This is the fundamental
> inspiration of every proposal for renewal – fidelity to God and
> fidelity to man (REF, 1970, par. 160).

At this time the Archdiocese of Melbourne, through its expanding administrative and educational arm, the Catholic Education Office (CEO), set about the task of writing religious education material that would reflect the theology of Vatican II. In 1968 it a fortnightly publication, *Let's Go Together*, was produced for use in Government schools (O'Brien, 1999, p. 66). In 1973 two separate departments within the CEO – the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, whose focus was Catholic students in Government schools, and the Religious Education Department, whose focus was Catholic students in Catholic schools – were combined under Fr Tom Doyle, who was appointed Director of the Catholic Education Office (Malone, 1982, p. 84). Fr Doyle had previously been responsible for Catholic students in Government schools and had been instrumental in the development of religious education materials for teachers working in those schools. Now as Director of the combined departments he authorised the development of materials for students in Catholic schools. Figure 1.1 lists the editions of the religious education material from 1973 to 1995.

Figure 1.1 Editions of *Guidelines for Religious Education* for secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

1973 Guidelines for Religious Education – six volumes, one for each year of secondary school.

1974 Guidelines for Religious Education (revision of 1973 edition).

1977 Guidelines for Religious Education Secondary Students – Part 1 Overview.

1978 Guidelines for Religious Education Secondary Students – Part 2 with three volumes: Junior, Middle and Senior Secondary.

1984 Guidelines for Religious Education Secondary Students, fully revised edition in three volumes: Junior, Middle and Senior Secondary.

1995 Guidelines for Religious Education Secondary Students, fully revised edition in three volumes: Junior, Middle and Senior Secondary.

Teachers in Catholic schools were expected to teach according to the new *Guidelines*. To assist teachers in schools with the theoretical and practical tasks of understanding the changes and adapting them to curriculum, a new role slowly emerged. At first some schools appointed a teacher, often a vowed religious, to assist teachers with the new religious education curriculum and to coordinate the development of the

religious education curriculum. It did not take long for the role to be called Religious Education Coordinator (REC).

It is within this general context that on December 1, 1974 the Archbishop of Melbourne commented on the role of the REC in a letter to accompany the newly revised *Guidelines*. In the letter he stated that "it is encouraging to know that so many of our schools have appointed a teacher to this role" (CEO, 1974). The role that had emerged at school level in response to the changes in religious education curriculum was now both encouraged and authorised from the central organisation at the CEOM. Changes in the Church's understanding of its mission in the world, in personnel teaching in Catholic school and in the understanding of religious education converged in the late 1960s, and out of them emerged the role of the REC.

1.3 The current context of the role of the REC

The role of the RECs grew out of the historical contexts outlined in Section 1.2 above. In 2002 lay teachers occupy the majority of key leadership roles of Principal, Deputy Principal, RECs and Curriculum Coordinators in Catholic schools. This situation, along with the changes of direction within the Church and in understandings of religious education, has meant that the role of the REC is a critical one.

The current context of RECs is different from that in 1970. There has been consistent growth in the number of RECs from the origin of the role in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when many schools did not have an REC, to the present situation where all schools have at least one person in the position. Along with this numerical growth have come increased demands and expansion of the role. One of the current questions in the Melbourne Archdiocese and beyond is how to deal appropriately with the rapid turnover of RECs in Catholic primary and secondary schools. There is a very low retention rate of RECs and Catholic authorities responsible for staffing this role suggest there are difficulties in attracting suitable candidates to take up the role. Investigating this phenomenon involves an exploration of the status and position of RECs within schools, their place on school administrative/leadership teams, their qualifications and experience, and the level of support given to them both at the school level and from the relevant CEO. This issue of personnel retention is one of the important issues dealt with in the empirical component of this thesis.

During the period under study there have been a small number of research projects into the role of the REC. For example, Blahut and Bezzina from the Diocese of Parramatta undertook their research because they saw the turnover of RECs as a matter of concern. The turnover was a concern "not only because of the disruption to schools and the system, but more importantly because of the effect on students and their teachers" (Blahut & Bezzina, 1998, p. 2). They analysed data from the period 1990-1996 about reasons for this constant turnover of REC personnel. Crotty's (1998a) research examined the role of the REC in the Sydney dioceses and the difficulties experienced in obtaining skilled and qualified personnel for the role. In addition, the limited research of Woodhouse (1983), Johnson (1989), Slattery (1989), Black (1986), McCourt (1981), Stuart (1981), Sierakowski (1991), Carroll (1992), Brandon (1984) and D'Orsa (1998) has provided a further context for the examination of the role of the RECs. The findings of this research are discussed at length in Chapter Five of this thesis. In brief, the common finding of their research is that the role of the RECS is both essential to the nature of Catholic schools and extremely demanding. It is so demanding in fact that attracting appropriate staff and retaining them is exceptionally difficult and raises acute questions for Catholic school authorities and individual schools.

1.4 The aims of the research

Given the shifts and developments in approaches to religious education in the past thirty years, and the historical contexts that have shaped the nature of Catholic schools in Australia, as well as the limited research into the role of the REC, it was decided that the focus of this research would be the role of the REC in Catholic secondary schools. The key question therefore that this thesis sought to answer was: *What are RECs' perceptions of their role within Catholic secondary schools?* A response to this question involves an exploration of the relevant literature in order to establish theoretical positions about the role, and to compare the findings of this research with other research that has been undertaken. The key question has been broken into a number of sub-questions:

> What understandings of religious education are present in the literature from the Catholic Church (international and national) and what are the implications of this literature for the role of the REC? (Chapter Two)

> What impact has research into religious education and the associated theories of religious education had upon the role of RECs? (Chapter Three)

What have been the significant events in the historical development of the role of the REC in the Archdiocese of Melbourne from 1970 to 2000? (Chapter Four)

What does data collected by the Melbourne CEO indicate about the role of the REC? (Chapter Four)

How has the role of the REC been structured within Catholic secondary schools? (Chapter Four)

What research has been previously undertaken in the role of the REC? (Chapter Five)

How has the role of REC been articulated by the Catholic Education Offices in its policy and curriculum documents? (Chapter Five)

What issues and factors emerge from this research that impact on the development of the role of the REC? (Chapters Seven to Nine)

What claims can be made about this role for contemporary Catholic schools? (Chapters Seven to Nine)

What theoretical understandings do RECs have about their role and how does their role relate to the body of literature from the Church, the CEOs and researchers into religious education? (Chapters Seven to Nine)

What recommendations can be suggested for the future development of the role? (Chapter Ten)

The empirical component of this research explores the role of the REC with the intention of gaining the perceptions of the role from the RECs themselves. The study is limited to RECs within Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne during the period 1970-2000. However, given the many similarities between Catholic schools across Australian dioceses, the implications of this research can be applied more widely than the present context.

The starting point of the research is 1970 with the publication of the REF. This was the first major document on religious education published in Australia after Vatican II and it became the foundational document for content and methodology for the *Guidelines* in all of its editions. The research concludes in 2000, at a time when all schools had at least one person in the role and many of the larger secondary schools had more than one.

The term 'REC' has been used as a generic term to incorporate those whose role it was to coordinate the religious education curricula within schools. For most of the

1970s and 1980s, the term 'REC' was used almost exclusively to designate that role. The person with this title was responsible for all the religious education activities within the school: both the curricula for all year levels and those activities that crossed year levels or involved the whole school. On other occasions, as determined by local school needs, assistant REC roles were designated. In some schools this meant that there was an assistant REC at each year level; in other settings there may have been assistants for Years 7-9 and Years 10-12. The structure of the role was determined at the individual school level and there were many variations in approach.

In the 1990s, as a response to the increased demands and diversity in the role, some schools divided the REC role into REC and Faith Development Coordinator (FDC). In schools where this division occurred, the REC generally had responsibility for what was taught in the religious education curricula in the classroom. The FDC, on the other hand, had responsibility for those aspects of the religious education curricula that took place outside the classroom such as retreats, liturgical and sacramental celebrations, voluntary social action groups and other similar activities. In addition, in recognition of the growing status of the REC within school administrative structures, some schools appointed RECs to senior positions with titles such as Director of Religious Education or Deputy Principal of Religious Education. Figure 1.2 indicates the usage of the terms 'REC' and 'FDC'.

Figure 1.2 Titles used in the thesis

School with one person in the role

REC — Religious Education Coordinator with responsibilities for religious education curricula both in the classroom and within the whole school.

Schools with two people in the role

REC — Religious Education Coordinator with responsibilities for religious education curricula in the classroom.

FDC — Faith Development Coordinator with responsibilities for religious education curricula outside the classroom

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Some schools have retained one title for the role, namely, REC. In these circumstances the title REC includes the responsibilities of REC and FDC. The result is

that, while the term 'REC' is the most commonly used term in schools. Currently there is an increasing divergence of terms that designate particular aspects of the role. Unless specifically stated in this thesis, the title REC designates all those who have had an appointed position within the school structure to be responsible for any aspect of religious education.

1.5 The significance of the thesis

This thesis examines the role of the REC in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne during the period 1970-2000. Hackett pointed out that research into religious education in Catholic secondary schools "over the last twenty years (1970-1990) has largely been focused upon the nature and expectations of the subject matter of religious education rather than evaluation and quality of learning" (Hackett, 1995, p. 13). He argued that by "the early nineties research in secondary RE was focused on the RE teachers and students in the classroom" (Hackett, 1995, p. 16). This thesis builds on that research in religious education by focusing on a previously limited area of research, the role of the REC.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter (Section 1.3), there has been limited but important research into the role of RECs. Much of that work has focused on Catholic primary schools and not secondary schools. Moreover, the research has been limited to minor research projects. This thesis is the first doctoral study in this area. Furthermore, it builds on previous research into religious education teachers. It examines the role of the REC among whose chief tasks is to work with religious education teachers in the delivery of religious education curricula in classrooms. In particular this thesis builds on the research in teaching religious education as reported by Malone (1990), Welbourne (1995), Engebretson (1995) and Rymarz (1997).

During this same period Catholic Education authorities in each of the dioceses around Australia produced role statements about RECs, either as guides for schools in their diocese or, in some dioceses, as actual policies. It is noteworthy that the various dioceses conceptualise these roles differently (Fleming 2001a, 2001b) and describe their tasks in different ways. Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne have produced their own documentation that contains the description of the role of the REC. These sources will be examined in this thesis as a means of coming to understand the complexity and demands of the role of the REC.

The thesis takes into account what research has found in regard to the nature of religious education, in regard to religious education teachers, and some limited research into RECs, and adds to it in unique ways. Fundamental to the research design and research methodology has been the intention of obtaining from the RECs their perspective on the role. This research was designed to determine how RECs describe the challenges and issues in their role with the intention of using this data to formulate theory in relation to the role of the REC.

The researcher himself has had professional experience as an REC in a number of Catholic secondary schools, and at the CEOM as an education officer with specific responsibility for liaison with and professional development of RECs in secondary schools. The professional experience gained in these roles means that the researcher has been able to focus the research clearly and has been aware of the role from an insider's perspective. This has enabled the researcher to guard against false assumptions and inappropriate conclusions.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

Following this chapter, Chapter Two undertakes an examination of Catholic literature on the nature and purpose of religious education as expressed in a range of international and national documents, including Vatican II documents, Papal statements, and statements by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, the Australian Bishops' Conferences, and Catholic Education Offices. These documents were analysed because they are the foundational documents in the understanding of religious education, both in the past and as it is understood today. In addition these documents outline the religious education perspectives that have been incorporated into religious education curriculum materials in diocesan guidelines.

Chapter Three examines the work (Australian and international) of researchers who have shaped understandings about religious education. The impact of this research has been in the development of religious education curricula and by implication on the role of the REC. In particular, two theoretical interpretations are examined: religious education as primarily catechesis and religious education as primarily educational. These theoretical interpretations of religious education are very broad and within them a number of different approaches are examined. This chapter

gives a comprehensive overview of the field and argues for an integrated approach for religious education that is primarily educational but is sensitive to the possibilities of catechesis.

Chapter Four presents a historical analysis of key data relating to the role of the REC in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Initially there is an examination of key conferences and professional development activities that had the specific purpose of examining the role of the REC, starting in 1973 and continuing until 1999. In addition there is an analysis of annual survey data on the role of the REC that has been collected by the CEOM since 1988. Finally there is a brief overview of material from other dioceses and from schools in relation to the role. Together this data establishes a historical context for the role of the REC and raises issues to be investigated in the empirical research.

Chapter Five focuses specifically on literature from research into the role of RECs in schools. The issues that emerged from this literature were used in determining the methodology of the research and the issues that would frame the empirical component of this thesis.

Chapter Six deals with the empirical research component of the thesis. In particular, it discusses issues relating to the nature of quantitative and qualitative research within social science research. It details the decisions made in regard to the type of research undertaken and the reasons for adopting in-depth interviews as the method of collecting data. Moreover, there is an outline of the decisions made in regard to the sampling of those interviewed. In addition, there is a description and justification of grounded theory as the preferred method of data analysis.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine present the major findings and the analysis of this thesis. There are five major categories of findings and these are allocated across the chapters. Finally, Chapter Ten provides a synthesis of the findings and offers recommendations that have emerged from the thesis.

Chapter Two

Theories of religious education drawn from primary sources

2.1 Introduction

In order to investigate, discuss and analyse the role of the REC later in this thesis, it is necessary to understand the nature of religious education in Catholic schools. Many terms have been used to describe its essential nature and characteristics including catechesis, religious education, religious instruction, evangelisation and religious studies (Nichols 1979, 1981, 1986; Treston 1985). In this thesis the generic term 'religious education' will be used to be inclusive of all other terms that are used for, and associated with, religious education in authoritative Church documents, because it is the most common term in the school context. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the nature of religious education as it is described in primary source Catholic documents, which have in turn informed the RECs perceptions of their role. It is against the background of these documents that the role of the REC is initially investigated. In Chapter Three, the literature from religious education theorists is explored in order to gain other perspectives on the nature of religious education, and how the nature or religious education relates to the role of the REC. Together, Chapters Two and Three build a theoretical basis for understanding the role of the REC.

Specifically this chapter examines the understanding of religious education that is developed in authoritative documentation of the Roman Catholic Church from Vatican II until the present. These primary source documents outline the Church's official understanding of religious education as it exists within the overall structure of the Church, as well as the specific nature of religious education in Catholic school settings. The documents provide a framework for the language about religious education, its purpose, content and methodology. As argued later in this chapter, there is a lack of consistency of language about religious education within the documents that are analysed. This lack of consistency has created difficulties in the development of theory in religious education, and difficulties in the application of any theory in school settings. Moreover, while the Church documents on religious education give an overarching direction and framework for an understanding of religious education, they do not provide a systematic and cohesive development of a theory of religious education. The lack of

consistency in the use of language and the lack of systematic development of theory in these documents inevitably leads to lack of clarity for all concerned.

Documents that have been analysed in this thesis are normative in that they establish principles and guidelines for the universal Catholic Church. At different levels within the organisational structure of the Church they are interpreted in differing ways. These documents are addressed specifically, though not exclusively, to Bishops who have pastoral responsibilities for schools and parishes. When interpreting the documents, Bishops apply them in such a way as to balance the needs of parishes and schools. Local Catholic Education Offices, under the direction of their Bishop, produce guidelines and religious education curriculum material based on elements of these normative documents. The focus of the Catholic Education Office is on schools rather than parishes, and so they interpret the normative documents primarily within an educational context. In turn, these Church documents have had a strong influence on the production of localised religious education curricula within Catholic secondary schools. RECs and religious education teachers implement religious education curricula supplied to them by their local diocesan Catholic Education Office. Figure 2.1 indicates the way in which documents are relayed through various levels and structures within the Catholic Church. They are filtered and shaped from the source, through a number of agencies, until they reach the school level. At the school level it is the responsibility of the REC to implement religious education in a manner that is truly consistent with Church principles.

Figure 2.1 Movement from the document's origin to the school context

International and national Church documents on religious education

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Bishops' Statements and directives to CEOs on religious education

↓

Catholic Education Offices religious education curricula

↓

Catholic schools religious education curricula

↓

RECs and implementation of religious education curriculum
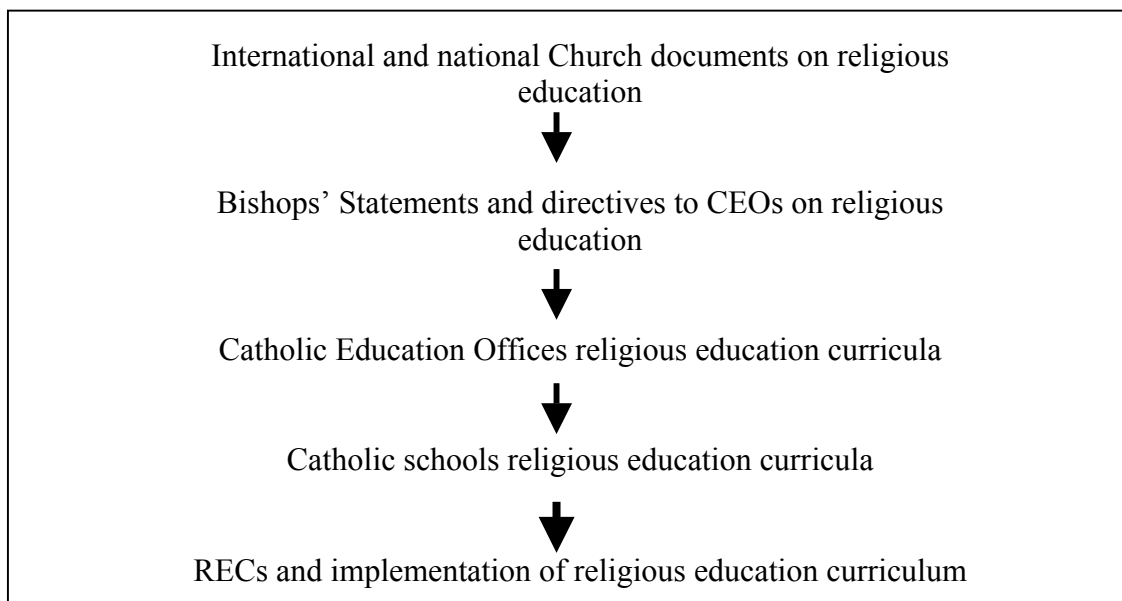
The purpose of analysing the documents is to examine the development of a theory of religious education as shown in the documents, and to elaborate on their significance for an understanding of religious education and the role of the REC.

2.2 Factors related to the study of the Church documents

Sequence of documents

The documents listed in Figure 2.2 are presented in the order and grouping in which they were analysed. It was a deliberate decision not to analyse the documents chronologically, despite the benefits this approach has in tracing the development of ideas from one document to another. On balance, it was decided that it was more important to analyse the documents according to the origin of each document, its authorship and its audience.

Figure 2.2 Order of analysis of primary source documents on religious education

Group 1: Documents of Vatican II and Popes
Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* [GE] – 1965
On Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [EN] – 1976
Catechesis in Our Time *Catechesi Tradendae* [CT] – 1979

Group 2: Documents from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy
General Catechetical Directory [GCD] – 1972
General Directory of Catechesis [GDC] – 1997

Group 3: Documents from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
The Catholic School [CS] – 1977
Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith [LCS] – 1982
The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School [RDE] – 1988
The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium [CSTM] – 1998

Group 4: Documents from the Australian Synod of Bishops
Renewal of the Education of Faith [REF] – 1970
We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord [WPJAL] – 1977
The Word Dwells Among Us [WDAU] – 1990
Australian Religious Education: Facing the Challenges [AREFC] – 1999

Not all Catholic Church documents that discuss aspects of religious education relate specifically to this thesis as they are directed at parishes and the broader mission of the Church. Therefore, while acknowledging the importance of such documents as *Lumen Gentium* (1964), *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1996) as major documents of the past thirty years, this analysis is concerned with those documents that are specifically concerned with Catholic education and religious education in school contexts. The documents were not chosen randomly. An examination of the literature of religious education revealed that these documents were regularly cited as important documents in the development of religious education theory (Ryan 1997; Malone 1992a; Rummery 1980; Regan 1999). Another reason for selecting these documents included the fact that they appear as resources in the various editions of the *Guidelines*.

A further consideration in an analysis of Church documentation in religious education was the distinctions that needed to be made between different levels of authority of the documents. Within the Church the authoritative level of documents descends in this way: Second Vatican Council; Papal Exhortations; Congregation (of clergy and education); Australian Bishops. The order of analysis of these documents follows these levels of authority.

<u>The problem of language in Church documents</u>

As indicated in Figure 2.2, there is a variety of sources of Church documents from different authors, representing different organisational sections of the Church. Church documents, according to Ryan, can be divided into two groups:

> [One] concerns the catechetical tradition of the Catholic Church and therefore addresses a wider audience than Catholic schools. The second set of documents focuses specifically on Catholic schools and in each case, discusses issues relevant to religious education (Ryan, 1997, p. 162).

In her research into teacher planning and programming, Malone (1992b) points to the confusion that teachers experience in understanding the language of Church documents because of a lack of understanding of the types of documents that are mentioned by Ryan (1997). Malone pinpoints two differing languages for religious education in these documents:

> There is a tendency to speak about religion and faith in 'church'
> language, actually quoting some of the above documents or at
> least using the terms and concepts they contain. The use of the
> language does not distinguish whether the sections being quoted
> were referring to catechetical contexts or had in mind the specific
> Catholic school context. The other language used is 'educational'
> and most of the curriculum statements about religious education
> use both these languages without any real integration and often in
> such a technical way that neither reflects the teacher language
> that forms the basis of actual planning and teaching (Malone,
> 1992, p. 10).

The work of Rummery (1970, 1975, 1980, 1982, 2001), Moran (1971, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1991) and Rossiter (1981, 1982, 1983, 1987a, 1987b) points to the critical importance of language as the basis for a clear articulation of a theory of religious education. They argue that all too often teachers and Catholic educational authorities are either not aware of the distinctions between educational and catechetical approaches or do not act within the constraints of these distinctions.

The impact of Church documents on schools

On the one hand, both Malone (1992a) and Ryan (1997) are positive in their analysis of the influence these primary source documents have had in the areas of curriculum design and materials. Malone lists diocesan guidelines, religious education textbooks, courses and in-services in religious education for teachers, as having been influenced by the particular theory of certain Church documents (Malone, 1992a, p. 4). Ryan too has argued:

> The Church's documentary tradition on Catholic schooling and
> catechesis has influenced strongly the shape and direction of
> religious education in Australian Catholic schools. Curriculum
> planners and curriculum guidelines writers have paid close
> attention to the directives contained in them (Ryan, 1997, p. 171).

Paradoxically both Ryan and Malone express reservations about the influence these documents have had on the teachers of religious education as they construct religious education curricula in their classrooms.

Malone argues that "many teachers have not read the various documents that have been published by the local and universal Church" (Malone, 1992a, p. 4). Her argument is supported and extended by Ryan, who suggests "the greater proportion of this material has been issued with little recognition by the majority of Australian

Catholic school religious educators" (Ryan, 1997, p. 162). His argument, in line with Malone, is that one of the reasons for this

> …has been the inaccessibility of the language of most documents which have blended Church theological terms with educational philosophy in a language which is unintelligible to most school teachers (Ryan, 1997, p. 171).

Researchers outside the discipline of religious education put forward similar views on language. While praising for its frankness the most recent statement of the Sacred Congregation for Religious Education, *Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Denis McLaughlin, Associate Professor in the School of Educational Leadership at Australian Catholic University, is scathing about the other documents that relate to religious education. He says that not only are they difficult to read, but "they tend to be essentialist in language and paternalistic in tone. They tend to inflate the goals of Catholic schools and to bear little relation to empirical reality" (McLaughlin, 1998, p. 29).

The confusion of the language and its lack of accessibility for teachers are important issues for this thesis. RECs work with religious education teachers in the delivery of curriculum that, in part, is drawn from these documents. Lack of understanding on the part of religious education teachers about the meaning of religious education presented in the normative documents of the Church (and implicit in the religious education materials produced by the CEOs) results in religious education curricula that lack coherence. Lack of consensus and clarity about the purpose, content and methodology of religious education curricula makes the REC role more difficult. Indeed, if the goals of the Catholic school are inflated and bear little relation to reality, as McLaughlin (1998) claims, then those who have a major responsibility for schools, Principals and RECs, are required to use a language to describe those tasks that is irrelevant to the majority of the teachers in their schools.

Implied philosophy of the documents

Embedded in the Church documents are at least two assumptions that need to be analysed. The first is that they are written assuming a socialisation function of religious education, where the primary catechetical concern is the handing on of the faith within a school setting. There is a body of research in Australian Catholic schools that has attempted to analyse and describe this perspective. While the work of Flynn (1975,

1979, 1984, 1985, 1993) and Fahy (1980, 1992) has been particularly valuable in understanding the socialisation process, socialisation does not encompass the entire function and purpose of the school. Many today argue that what happens in a religious education classroom is not primarily for purposes of socialisation in religion, but rather for education in religion (Rossiter 1983; Ryan 1997; Malone 1990). Consequently, a too heavy emphasis on the socialisation process as the primary aim of the religious education classes in Catholic schools can lead to a distortion of the aims and purposes of the religious education curriculum.

In addition, another assumption in the documentary sources is contained in the expression Catholic schools are 'communities of faith'. Using the expression 'community of faith' is most appropriate for parish settings where people voluntarily gather to express and share their faith. Using this expression in the school context involves many assumptions about the nature of the school as a community, as well as assumptions about the faith of the students and staff. On the one hand, it assumes that the community is a believing community. On the other hand, it assumes that what takes place in religious education classes is a dialogue between believers. While such assumptions can be validly made in parish settings, they are much less valid in the dynamics of the religious education classroom in a pluralist society.

As will be examined in Chapter Three, Rossiter (1983), Rummery (1975) and Moran (1992) argue that while the two approaches can be linked there is a difference between the teaching of religion and the handing on of the faith (catechesis), and they warn against the dangers of substituting one for the other. Consequently, the analysis of Church documents as a basis for an understanding of religious education for schools needs to proceed cautiously and balance the catechetical and educational interpretations.

2.3 An analysis of selected documents from the Second Vatican Council and from Pope Paul VI and John Paul II

<u>Introduction</u>

This analysis seeks to determine aspects of religious education as contained in the documents that are of most relevance for the examination of the role of the REC. The documents were analysed for their discussion of the nature of religious education in

Catholic schools; the understanding of the place and role of a Catholic school; and the role of the religious education teacher in Catholic schools. Three documents are analysed in this section: The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE); On Evangelization in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN); and Catechesis in Our Time, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT).

For the purposes of this thesis, only one document, GE, was chosen from the sixteen that were promulgated at Vatican II because it focused on education and had application in school contexts. The two papal documents EN and CT, selected from a range of post-concilia papal statements, explore in very broad terms the teaching role of the Church as contained in the terms 'evangelisation' and 'catechesis'. These terms are intimately connected with 'religious education' and are central to a development of a theory of religious education within the Church's documentary sources.

The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE) – 1965

The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Education*is, was promulgated in the last session of Vatican II in 1965. The use of the term 'Christian' in the title denotes an ecumenical perspective on education and reflects the intent of Vatican II to address its message to a broader audience than just members of the Catholic Church. Bracketing the word 'education' with Christian is an indication of the importance of education within a quest for faith. The document itself is very small when compared to most of the other documents from Vatican II, consisting of a mere twelve sections. GE is categorised as a 'declaration', which is significantly less important than documents that are categorised as constitutions.[1] Nevertheless, it is significant in that 'Christian education' was deemed important enough by the participants at Vatican II to require a separate document rather than be incorporated into another.

In his commentary on GE, G. Carter stated that in it "the Church comes directly to grips with the problem of formal education, particularly in schools" (Carter, 1966, p. 634), as opposed to education within a broader Church context. Carter adds that GE "deals only with a few fundamental principles and that a more developed point of view is being left to a special post-concilia Commission and to the Conferences of Bishops" (p. 634).

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[1] For a detailed analysis of the relative importance of different categories of Church and Papal documents and pronouncements, see Gaillardetz (1997) and Bertone (1997).

A theoretical understanding of religious education is not referred to separately in this document but rather exists almost as a sub-category within a broad definition of education. GE argues that all people have a right to education and that:

> …true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his [*sic*] goal, and simultaneously with respect to the good of those societies of which, as a man [*sic*], he is a member, and in whose responsibilities, as an adult, he will share (Abbott, 1967, par. 1).

These dimensions of religious education are not restricted to schooling, but are seen more generally as part of the Church's mission to announce "salvation to all men [*sic*]" (Abbott, 1967, par. 3). Religious education is more than imparting knowledge merely for knowledge's sake. It is an aid to salvation. Significantly, however, there is no mention of the content and methodology of religious education. The preparation of content material in religious education is seen as the task of the local bishop. There is also an absence of the words and concepts of 'evangelisation' and particularly of 'catechesis' that proliferate in other Church documents. The focus here instead is on broad, general principles of Christian education.

Some sections of GE relate to the role of the teacher and as such build a broad theory of this role in a Catholic school (pars. 8-9). It is important to note here that the document refers to all teachers and there is no specific mention of the religious education teacher. It is stated that the role of the teacher is vital – so vital in fact that, in the view of GE, it is all teachers who "determine whether the Catholic school can bring its goals and undertakings to fruition" (par. 8). Furthermore, reference was made to the necessity of having teachers in the role who are certified and have the qualifications that are necessary for the task. Finally, in relation to teachers it is stressed that they give witness by the ways in which they live and teach. The act of teaching is one of witness, and it implies a synchronicity between the message and the messenger. The implication contained in the term 'witness' suggests that the teacher is more like a 'catechist', one who shares faith and the faith journey with students and is a fellow believer. Such implications raise serious questions relating to who teaches and coordinates religious education in Catholic schools, as well as the purpose of religious education itself.

In constructing theoretical understandings of the role of a school, the document proposes that all schools ripen "the capacity for right judgement" (par. 5). They provide "an introduction into the cultural heritage won by past generations" as well as promoting "a sense of values" (par. 5), and prepare students for "professional life" (par. 5). In addition to the pursuit of cultural goals that are common to all schools, the Catholic school is "distinctive" as it tries to create "an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity" (par. 8).

On Evangelization in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) – 1976

The document on evangelisation was promulgated more than ten years after Vatican II. Thomas Walters claimed that this "exhortation is the first church document devoted entirely to the topic of evangelisation" (Walters, 1996, p. 150). EN was written in response to the "profound changes of present-day society" (par. 14) and described the task of evangelisation as "proper to the Church, her deepest identity" (par. 14). In particular, EN explores the cultures in which evangelisation takes place and the need for the Church to work with and within the culture. It seeks to balance respect for the tradition of the Catholic Church with the needs of the culture within which the tradition resides (par. 67). This engagement of the Church with the world, and a recognition that the Church exists within particular cultures of the world, had been promulgated in the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* at Vatican II. EN represents the continued search by the Church to communicate and dialogue with an increasingly secular society (Rymarz, 1997a, p. 39).

A critical issue for this thesis is the connection that EN makes between evangelisation, catechesis and religious education. Evangelising is defined as "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity" (par. 18) while its purpose is "interior change" (par. 18). This theory of evangelisation is exercised in the preaching of the good news, the gospel, to all people and is an invitation to all people to respond in faith. Traditionally the term 'evangelisation' was applied to missionaries who went to non-Christian lands and who gave witness in deed and word to the person of Jesus. EN expands that concept of Christian evangelisation and applies it to all people as part of their ongoing journey of life. All people are called to be witnesses to Jesus (par. 21).

Further dimensions of the term 'evangelisation' in EN include catechetical instruction and religious instruction:

A means of evangelization that must not be neglected is that of catechetical instruction. The intelligence, especially that of children and young people, needs to learn through systematic religious instruction the fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which God has wished to convey to us (par. 44).

EN links evangelisation and catechetical instruction to systematic religious instruction of young people within the broad cultural, evangelical and missionary activity of the Church. EN further argues that catechetical instruction is broader than schools and refers specifically to what occurs within the Church and within homes (par. 44). However, a less than careful reading of the text could lead to the presupposition that evangelisation and catechesis is the primary task of religious education in schools. There is a link between these areas of religious education, but they are not synonymous.

Catechesis in Our Time, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) – 1979

Pope John Paul II promulgated *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) in November 1979. Historically this document emerged from the Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 1977 with the theme of catechesis in relation to children and young people. CT was an "important landmark in the history of the post war catechetical movement" (Rummery, 1980, p. 27), because it was a document solely directed to this chief work of the Church, namely, catechesis. CT is almost entirely devoted to issues of the broader Church with only one section of the seventy-three relating to schools. This is not a document where the religious dimension of schools is central, nor is it a document where religious education curriculum is expanded.

Because 'catechesis' is a word that is often used and misused in connection with religious education, care needs to be taken to determine what this document says about catechesis. Similar to evangelisation in EN, catechesis in CT is much broader than schools and is a term that applies to the total educational mission of the Church. In the opening paragraph, the historical understanding of catechesis is made explicit: the "Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks" (par. 1). Catechesis was the name "given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God" (par. 1). In this sense, all of what the Church does is catechesis.

The primary setting of catechesis is the parish: "It is true that catechesis can be given anywhere, but I wish to stress … that the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" (par. 67). While parishes are the primary places for catechesis, CT takes into account other diverse places where catechesis could be supported such as chaplaincies in state schools and Catholic educational institutions (par. 67). The key word here is supported. The role of the religious education curriculum in the schools is to support catechesis, not to be a substitute for it. Nevertheless, the document returns to emphasise the central place of catechesis as the parish: "In short, without monopolizing or enforcing uniformity, the parish remains, as I have said, the pre-eminent place for catechesis" (par. 67).

CT also reinforces the links between catechesis and evangelisation. Catechesis and evangelisation "have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other" (par. 18) and between which "there is no separation or opposition" (par. 18). Evangelisation is the first step of the process that leads to catechesis:

> To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord, and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart (par. 20).

CT also states that "the specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful" (par. 20). Following the directions of CT itself, catechesis occurs pre-eminently in parishes and families.

A further point in CT relates to the methods of catechesis and is influenced by educational insights at the time the document was written. The methods by which catechesis is undertaken require "revision", a "search for suitable language" and "the utilisation of new means of transmitting the message" (par. 17). In addressing the controversy of the time over traditional or life-centred approaches to catechesis,[2] the document is clear: "Nor is any opposition to be set up between a catechesis taking life as

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[2] In Chapter Three of this study there is a detailed analysis of different approaches to religious education, including the traditional approach with an emphasis on doctrine and the life-centred approach which uses the lives of students as the starting point for religious education.

its starting point of departure and a traditional, doctrinal and systematic catechesis" (par. 22).

CT also examines the place that catechesis has in a Catholic school. In relation to catechesis the document says that "together with and in connection with the family, the school provides catechesis with possibilities that are not to be neglected" (par. 69). One of these possibilities lies within religious instruction:

> The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils (par. 69).

The document proposes that "in fact, even in places where objective difficulties exist, it should be possible to arrange school timetables in such a way as to enable Catholics to deepen their faith and religious experience, with qualified teachers, whether priest or lay people" (par. 69).

The term 'catechesis' should not be taken from its rightful context within parishes and be used as a substitute for religious education in Catholic schools. The interchanging of the terms without regard for their different contexts has resulted in an inappropriate understanding of the purposes and nature of religious education as it relates to Catholic secondary schools.

2.4 Documents from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy

Introduction

Congregations such as the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy are part of the administrative structure of the Catholic Church based in Rome. In 1967 the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy replaced the Congregation of the Council within that structure. Among the duties of the Congregation is the promotion of activities for clergy and their ministry. In addition, the Catechetical Office, which operates within the Congregation:

> …provides for the religious formation of the faithful of all ages and states of life; it issues appropriate norms so that catechetical teaching is imparted in a suitable fashion; it ensures that

catechetical formation is properly executed; it grants the prescribed approvals for national Catechisms and Directories; it assists catechetical offices and follows initiatives regarding religious formation and international events dealing with such issues.[3]

This Congregation has produced two major directories on catechesis, one in 1972 and the other in 1997. Coincidentally, these directories cover the approximate time span of this thesis, and provide the opportunity to study the changes that have occurred in religious education during this time.

Background to the General Catechetical Directory – (GCD) – 1972

Before analysing the material in the document, the genre of 'directory' in Church literature needs to be clarified. One proposal raised during Vatican II was the possible production of a Catechism as had been the decision at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). However, Vatican II opted for a directory rather than a catechism (Horan 1996). The difference in these documentary forms is taken up by Pollard (1996):

> The genre 'directory' is quite different from the genre 'catechisms'. A catechetical directory by its nature and form contains directives, guidelines, exhortations, proposals, recommendations and procedures. A catechism by its nature and form contains a complete and faithful presentation of the fundamental Christian truths formulated in a way that facilitates their understanding (Pollard, 1996, p. xi).

Horan (1996) argues that "the *Directory* represents a new genre for catechesis" because it "does not offer content so much as orientation to the ministry of the word, and it locates catechesis within that ministry" (Horan, 1996, p. 4).

Historically, Horan argues, the document emerged from the development of catechetical theory in the international catechetical study weeks in the years prior to Vatican II. The study weeks (Nijmegen 1959, Eichstatt 1960, Bangkok 1962, Katigoondo 1964, Manila 1967, Medellin 1968) were organised by Johannes Hofinger and others from the East Asian Pastoral Institute and "functioned as think tanks for catechetical theorists and practitioners during the pre-concilia years" (Horan, 1996, p. 3). In the Australian context the influence of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) is

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[3] Available http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/index.html. [Downloaded June 2001]

unmistakable. Two leading figures of the EAPI, Fathers Nebreda and Amalorpavadass, were invited by Cardinal Knox of the Archdiocese of Melbourne to present papers at national conferences on catechesis in Melbourne in the early 1970s. They brought with them a new understanding of catechesis that will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Three. Their theoretical and pedagogical points in relation to the intention of the document became the basis for the *Guidelines* and have remained the conceptual framework of these *Guidelines* until the present day (Malone 1992a; Engebretson 1997a).

Content of the GCD

Historically this document is the first attempt after Vatican II to systematically reformulate the goals of the Church in relation to religious education. It expresses clearly that the task of the teaching Church is catechesis, and it sets out the content of catechesis in what Malone (1992a) described as "church language". For Malone, "church language" refers to a theological language of religious education as opposed to an educational language for religious education. The 1972 GCD contains a number of points that are critical in relation to religious education. The "intent of this Directory is to provide the basic principles of pastoral theology" (Foreword, p. 1) rather than to present doctrinal theology or a systematic expression of beliefs that are more appropriate to a Catechism. Pastoral theology and the practicalities that emerge for Catholic schools are the responsibility of the local Bishop.

Catechesis (pars. 21-23) is aimed to bring individuals to maturity of faith and to deepen their conversion and witness to the faith. The people involved in the task of catechesis, namely catechists, as well as leading a life of witness, must also be competent in what they do. The GCD recognises the impact that developments in specialist fields of knowledge have on catechesis, and urges catechists to "use the help which can be given by the sacred sciences, theology, Bible studies, pastoral thought and the human sciences" (par. 9). Drawing upon this knowledge, the catechists can select a pedagogical method that takes into account the life circumstances of those being catechised (par. 46). As catechists they function as agents in the socialisation process with the primary aim of promoting faith and commitment. What is at issue here is the degree to which religious education teachers in Catholic schools should be called 'catechists', and the degree to which they are more suitably called 'religious education teachers'.

The GCD's primary focus is the pastoral dimension of the Church, as well as the role that catechesis plays in the educational dimension of the Church. Of far less concern in this document is education within the context of schooling. In the index of the GCD there are only four references to education, and one to schoolchildren. The GCD's theoretical framework is catechetical and not educational. This is evidenced most strongly in the term that is used in the GCD for those involved in catechesis, and that is 'catechist'. This is a Catholic Church term to denote activities in parishes. In school educational settings the term 'teacher' is used for those involved in religious education. These terms imply vastly different processes and assumptions and should not be considered the same, and should not be used interchangeably. Furthermore, the terms 'evangelisation' and 'catechesis' as they are used in the document imply, and call for, a faith response, a conversion. It is questionable whether within the restrictions of the classroom such responses are possible or suitable. What is troublesome about this document is the extent to which it has been quoted in religious education curriculum guidelines in Australia (Ryan, 1998, p. 20) as the basis upon which curriculum in the religious education classroom is to be constructed. On the other hand, one of the strengths of the document is its view on pedagogy in religious education:

> The Directory refers repeatedly to the need to teach a traditional truth in a modern and scientific and pluralist world, through creative structures, and to teach not merely by repeating ancient doctrine but rather adapting it to new problems with a growing understanding of it (Welbourne, 1995, p. 104).

The document encourages the use of varied methodologies that have grown out of new understandings and does not intend to limit the methodologies to the method use in the Catechisms.

The General Directory for Catechesis – (GDC) – 1997

The rewriting of the 1972 directory in 1997 provided an occasion for the Congregation of the Clergy to incorporate the directions of the documentary heritage of the previous twenty-five years. The "Preface" to the GDC stresses that one of the aims of the directory was to strike a balance between two principles that were to be found in other Church documents. The two principles were "the contextualization of catechesis in evangelization as envisaged by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*" and "the appropriation of the content of the faith as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (pp. 14-15). It

reiterated that, as with the previous directory, this document seeks to provide pastoral principles as guidelines for the production of national and diocesan directories and materials related to catechesis (par. 9). Similarly to the GCD, this second directory allocated only three paragraphs out of 291 to the nature of the religious education program of Catholic schools. Both documents have limited statements on religious education in schools. Consequently, it is clear from both directories that the primary understanding of catechesis belongs to the whole life of the Church. Religious education in the classrooms of Catholic schools has, on the other hand, a small but important part to play in catechesis.

In the paragraph on the proper character of religious instruction in schools, the GDC articulates a clear description of the relationship between catechesis and religious education that was not present in the 1972 directory. This distinction, as will be illustrated in the next section of this chapter, is present in some documents written by the Congregation for Catholic Education after the first directory and has taken up by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in the new GDC.

The relationship between religious instruction in schools and catechesis is one of distinction and complementarity: "there is an absolute necessity to distinguish clearly between religious instruction and catechesis" (par. 73). The reasons for the "absolute necessity" to clearly distinguish the two are not given; however, the distinction is clearly stated:

> It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as 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 (par. 73).

The articulation of the importance of the cognitive demands of religious education in schools and the need to present religious education with the same rigour at other subjects is a major advance on the first directory. The statement has drawn on documents produced by the Congregation for Catholic Education as well as the wealth of research into religious education that occurred in the period between the directories and which emphasised this aspect of religious education.

2.5 Documents from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education

Introduction

The *Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education* has authority for seminaries, universities and schools. The various documents that this Congregation has produced for schools need to be seen as complementary to, but distinct from, other sources already surveyed. They fit within the Church's documentary tradition but have a particular focus on formal Catholic education as it occurs in schools and universities. They are written with a combination of educational and catechetical language, a point referred to by Veverka (1996) in his examination of the *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* and which applies to the other documents as well:

> The literature of Catholic education emphasizes a necessary and intrinsic relationship between religious formation and social, cultural and intellectual development. The language of catechesis reflects its biblical roots and pastoral orientation. The core principles of Catholic education reflect the systematic framework of neoscholastic philosophical sources (Veverka, 1996, p. 486).

The Catholic School – (CS) – 1977

The first of the documents from this Congregation addresses the nature of a Catholic school, in language that draws upon GE. It devotes much attention to language that is used to describe the religious education process in schools. Drawing upon the concepts developed in EN this document recalls that:

> …evangelisation is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is, she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God (par. 7).

Schools are part of that mission of the Church, and as such can be places of evangelisation. Other sections of CS describe schools as places where the young are exposed to the world (par. 27), where they have the opportunity to develop ethical approaches to life (par. 30), and where values can be explored (par. 32). Teachers have a critical role in exposing faith dimensions to the young (par. 4).

The document explores the teaching of religious education, and presents a theory of religious education in schools which is not confined to religious education classes:

> Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools it must be emphasised that, while such teaching is not merely confined to 'religious classes' within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless, also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the child's mind between religious and other forms of education (par. 50).

CS differentiates religious education from catechesis and states "that the proper place for catechesis is the family helped by other Christian communities, especially the local parish" (par. 51). However, CS articulates a connection between parish and schools similar to the GDC. Schools assist this primary catechesis when "young people are helped to grow towards maturity of faith" (par. 51).

Absent from the document is any detailed reference to the formal religious education curricula, as it operates in schools. Limiting the discussion of religious education to the broad religious dimensions of school and not taking into account classroom religious education avoids the issue of articulating a theory that seeks to balance religious education and catechesis. The document sets religious education within the broader catechetical perspective of the Church (Malone, 1992, p. 8) and not within religious education as it occurs in classrooms in Catholic schools.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith – (LCS) – 1982

One of the worldwide historical influences on the contents of this document was the change from religious order dominance in Catholic schools to lay dominance. As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, there was a marked decline of members of religious orders in Catholic schools in the 1970s within Australia. By the time this document was promulgated in 1982, lay teachers were in the majority in Catholic secondary schools, not just in Australia but also worldwide. LCS clearly addresses this changed reality of personnel in Catholic schools. LCS commences with the recognition that lay Catholics in primary and secondary schools "have become more and more vitally important in recent years" (par. 1). It is lay teachers, "believers or not, who will substantially determine whether or not a school realises its aims and accomplishes its objectives" (par. 1). The lay educators exercise a specific mission within the Church.

They need to have the best possible professional qualifications and be inspired by faith (par. 24).

Explicit mention is made of a new description of an aspect of the role of the teacher, that of vocation. This is borrowed from the theology of religious life where women and men who responded to God's call were said to have a vocation, a calling. This language, once primarily associated with vowed women and men religious, has been transferred to include all teachers in Catholic schools: "It is, therefore, very desirable that every lay Catholic educator become fully aware of the importance, the richness, and the responsibility of this vocation" (par. 37). Referring to the life of a teacher as a vocation, and stressing their role as witness, frames the teacher in church language, as opposed to their primary function as educators.

A critical insight that this document brings is the recognition that aspects of the teaching of religious education are not necessarily part of catechesis (Malone, 1992, p. 8). It commences by reiterating the principles in GE that religious education is actually a right of all people. LCS then clarifies the nature of religious instruction and its relationship to catechesis. It should not go unnoticed that this document represents a decisive turning point in the discussion about religious education and catechesis:

> Therefore, the teaching of the Catholic religion, distinct from and
> at the same time complementary to catechesis, properly so called,
> ought to form a part of the curriculum of every school (par. 56).

This is the first time in any of the Roman documents that this distinction is made. What is meant by this complementarity, however, is not developed in LCS. It reflects the influence of the work of religious education theorists and researchers within the discipline of religious education who had been arguing since the early 1970s for this understanding of religious education in relation to schools. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this distinction was later used in the GDC as well.

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School – (RDE) – 1988

The purpose of this document from the *Congregation for Catholic Education* was to provide guidelines for reflection and renewal for Catholic schools and those who work in them. The Congregation called on Bishops and Superiors of religious orders to reflect upon the impact of Vatican II. The title of the document indicates that this document examines much more than formalised religious education curriculum or

religious instruction classes within schools. The 'religious dimension' is a much broader area and refers to all aspects of the life of the school; it includes all teachers, all subject areas, and all other elements intrinsic to the school curriculum.

In the development of the theory of religious education in schools, RDE is the first document to provide a sustained and detailed proposal of an educational perspective, departing from the specifically catechetical perspective contained in many of the documents already analysed. It has significantly added to the theory developed in LCS. The term 'catechesis' as the preferred term for religious education, widely used in CT, EN, GCD, GDC and CS, is rarely mentioned in RDE. In fact, the term is not used until part four of the five-part document (pars. 68-73). The purpose of the reference to catechesis at that point is to make a clear distinction between it and religious instruction:

> There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message. The close connection makes it possible for a school to remain a school and still integrate culture with the message of Christianity. The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality (par. 68).

RDE makes this distinction when it examines the aims and purposes of catechesis and education:

> The aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community. The aim of the school is knowledge. While it uses the same elements of the Gospel message, it tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. It is evident, of course, that religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one's knowledge of the Christian message (par. 69).

Moreover, the teacher, both professionally and personally, is cast as central to the effectiveness of this religious dimension (par. 96). More specifically, "the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher" (par. 96). The 'witness' component of the teacher's role receives a prominent place within the document, as it does in other documents previously mentioned in this chapter. However, the prominence of the witness does not override the need to have suitably trained and

qualified teachers: "Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation" (par. 97).

In addition RDE expresses an understanding of the role of the school in relation to religious instruction:

> A Catholic school is not simply a place where lessons are taught; it is a centre that has an operative educational philosophy, attentive to the needs of today's youth and illumined by the Gospel message (par. 22).

Schools deal primarily with students as they present themselves at school, but they also have a connection with what occurs in the lives of students outside of school. In RDE it is suggested that religious instruction needs to be linked with those areas of the students' lives that are outside of school: "Finally, religious instruction in the school needs to be coordinated with the catechesis offered in parishes, in the family, and in youth associations" (par. 70). This is perhaps the clearest reference to the complementarity between religious education and catechesis while at the same time highlighting their differences. Religious education occurs within the educational settings of the classroom and utilises all the techniques and insights that educational theory and understandings of classroom practice permit. Catechesis occurs within the settings of families, parishes and voluntary associations where people gather for the purpose of the sharing of faith. Assumptions such as those implied in the catechetical approach cannot be easily applied to the religious education classroom in Catholic schools, yet they do support each other. Religious education leaves open and encourages the possibility of catechesis.

It is clear in this document that the realities of school life have been foundational to its articulation of theory in relation to religious education. The document recognises that the nature of schools has changed, that they are now more multicultural and pluralistic than ever before. There is also recognition that the nature of education itself has changed, and that religious education needs to draw upon those changes to be educationally valid. The mention of objectives, syllabus, links with other disciplines, promotion of culture, use of best methodologies, etc. (par. 56) is a testimony to the ways in which this document is embedded in the world of school education and is attempting to address the needs of schools. Furthermore, "this document is attempting to chart different territory from the catechetical documents" (Ryan, 1997, p. 174), focusing on the broad religious and educational dimensions of schooling.

CSTM is the most recent of the documents from the Congregation of Education. It is an exceptionally small document (twenty-one paragraphs) when compared with all the other documents so far analysed. The document uses the onset of the third millennium to restate, in summary fashion, the principles of the Catholic school in the light of "new challenges which are the result of a new socio-political and cultural context" (par. 1). Among those challenges are "extreme pluralism" (par. 1) and "rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globilisation of the economy" (par. 1). In the midst of these changes, CSTM urges Catholic schools to undergo a "courageous renewal" (par. 3) because of their "fundamental duty to evangelise" (par. 3). Schools are described as having two functions:

> The Catholic school should be able to offer young people the means to acquire the knowledge they need in order to find a place in society which is strongly characterized by technical and scientific skill. But at the same time, it should be able, above all, to impart a solid Christian formation (par. 8).

CSTM points out that there have been important developments and insights gained in the science of education and other areas of knowledge but society has not been as devoted to "the essence of education as such, centred on deeply meaningful values and vision" (par. 10). The document reiterates the connection between Church and school, and describes schools as places "of ecclesial experience" (par. 15). Teaching within such a context "has an extraordinary moral depth" (par. 19) and the person of the teacher is very important.

2.6 Documents from the Australian Bishops

Introduction

The four documents from the Australian Bishops during the period 1970-2000 of this thesis reflect different contexts and serve different purposes. The *Renewal of the Education in Faith* (1970) was not written by the Australian Bishops but published and authorised by them. It was an English translation of an Italian document, published in Australia and containing a small and insignificant addendum that was designed to give the document an Australian focus. This decision by the Australian Bishops was not greeted with total support and the assumption that the Australian addendum was

sufficient to bridge cultural boundaries and different Church structures was called into question (Rummery 1980). The second of the documents, *We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord* (1977), was the production of a sub-committee of the Australian Bishops and was not supported by all the Bishops (Malone 1992a). In that sense it represents a divergent voice in the hierarchy of Australian Bishops at a time in the history of the development of religious education that was marked by the tensions and anxieties discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. The third document, *The Word Dwells Among Us* (1990), is very much in the mode of a catechism and theological directory. The sub-title of the document gives an indication of its intent: "A summary of Catholic beliefs and practices for teachers in schools and parishes". It does not present a theory of religious education, but outlines the necessary content of religious education. *Australian Religious Education: Facing the Challenges* (1999) is a summary of the major documents on catechesis and religious education since the Second Vatican Council. The Australian documentary tradition does not present a systematic and cohesive understanding and development of a theory of religious education but tends to repeat similar levels of confusion and ambiguity to the Roman documents already analysed in this chapter.

Renewal of the Education of Faith – (REF) – 1970

The Italian and Australian Bishops released the REF prior to the publication of the GCD. In a hasty response to the call of Vatican II for the production of national directories, the Bishops decided that a translation of the Italian text, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, would be suitable and helpful for Australian parishes and schools. As treated in the historical context in Chapter One of this thesis, there was considerable controversy over religious education in the late 1960s. Australian Bishops, acutely aware of the local controversy over the changed methods of religious education in this country that followed Vatican II, used this official Italian document to give authenticity to the approach that was being used in Australia. With some haste, and as a means of neutralising controversy, the Bishops decided to authorise the REF for Australia, hoping that an official document might avoid further polarisation (Malone, 1982, p. 49). This was greeted with some dismay in Australia, and the debate focused on the translation of the Italian word "catechesi" as "education in faith" and the blurring of catechesis and education that this translation implied.

In the REF there are new terms introduced into the language of religious education. 'Evangelisation' and 'catechesis' are used regularly, and so are the new terms

'pre-evangelisation' and 'pre-catechesis' (as stages prior to evangelisation and catechesis). Evangelisation is described as "that first announcement of salvation to someone who, for various reasons, has no knowledge of it, or does not yet believe in it" (par. 25), while catechesis is:

> …the systematic unfolding of the first announcement of the Good News…. It is the initiation of men [*sic*] into the life of the Church…. Its purpose is to lead people to maturity in their faith (par. 30).

The connections between evangelisation and catechesis are clear. Catechesis and religious education are also linked:

> Catechesis in the school must be in conformity with modern school methods and aims. The school's fundamental preoccupation is the integral formation of man [*sic*] as citizen through contact with his culture. Religious education must be seen in this context as a duty and as a dutiful service which society renders to all (par. 154).

It can be argued that the interchange of the language between evangelisation, catechesis and religious education is not helpful.

Blurring the distinctions between the work of catechists in parishes and religious education teachers in schools can also lead to confusion. Rather than clarifying the issues, the document added to the ongoing confusion between catechesis and religious education:

> The Catholic Secondary School has the privilege of giving a vital Catechesis to pupils during their developing years from puberty to young adulthood. It should aim at being a living community, a community living the Catechesis that the school is proclaiming (par. 2).

It is evident that the language used in this document in relation to religious education in Catholic schools is catechetical language and it is based upon the interpretation of catechesis rather than education. This catechetical language influenced the language of many of the guidelines for religious education in Australian Catholic schools (Malone, 1992a, p. 8).

An additional problem created by the inclusion of this catechetical language in the education and curriculum documentation from the Catholic Education Offices was the "inability of the majority of teachers to speak the church language" of catechesis (Malone, 1990, p. 40). The importance, applicability and relevance of the nature of catechesis and religious education as presented in the REF may have been clear in the mind of the Bishops and those in the Catholic Education Offices. Religious education teachers and RECs in schools, however, were not always skilled and qualified enough to make the necessary decisions and distinctions and continued to equate catechesis with religious education.

We Preach Jesus as Lord – (WPJAL) – 1977.

This document was not released with the full support of the Australian Bishops but from its educational subcommittee, and as such it represents divisions within the Australian hierarchical Church about the nature and content of religious education. The historical importance of this action by a minority of Catholic Bishops should not be overlooked. At this period in the Australian Church (the 1970s), there was confusion and hostility about the role of Catholic schools and the religious education programs that were offered in them. There were two opposing positions within the Australian Church. The first position found it difficult to accept the theology of Vatican II and its presence in religious education materials for Catholic schools. The second position promoted this theology and the materials that accompanied it. WPJAL emerged from the group within the Australian hierarchy who supported the second position. Much of the material in the document is an elaboration for the Australian Church of the key principles of Vatican II. Changes in the Church and in education are extensively dealt with in the text itself (pp. 42-46).

"Education in faith", the phrase from the REF, is used as the theoretical perspective for religious education in WPJAL, but the document recognises some of the changed emphases of these terms:

> Within the framework of Christian education, we have seen develop in recent years a new emphasis on the term 'religious eduction', an expression which reinforces its traditional attention to the place of '*religion* in education' by stressing that its own process must be broad enough to merit the description also of '*education* in religion'. The increasing use in the Church of the traditional word 'catechesis' further reminds us of that most profound sharing in faith which is seen as a 'dialogue of

believers', and 'education in faith' (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1977, pp. 39-40).

This articulation of the interplay between religion and education reflected the issues at the core of the division between various groups within the Catholic Church at this point in time. The document proposes that the primary place for catechesis is the Church and that the emphasis in schools is on education.

The Word Dwells Among Us – (WDAU) – 1990

Unlike the previous Australian document, *We Preach Jesus Christ as Lord* was published as a united voice of the Australian Bishops. The purpose of this text is quite explicit in that it offered "teachers of Catholic faith a summary of those basic Catholic beliefs and practices that are to be presented to students in Catholic school and parish Religious Education programs" (par. 1). In many ways this is a 'catechism' that presents the content of faith under ten headings as an aid for teachers in Catholic schools. It offers little by way of a conceptualisation of religious education.

It articulates the purpose of Catholic schools and the contribution that all teachers in Catholic schools have to the religious development of the students while maintaining the integrity of the individual subject discipline. Absent from this document, which is designed to help teachers in Catholic schools, is any reference to the role that a Religious Education Faculty or REC has in the process of using it with the religious education teachers. The pedagogical assumption of the document is that if teachers of religious education have information they can construct more appropriate curricula. There are no guidelines to assist teachers in incorporation of this material into religious education curricula in schools. The bishops' priority was to supply teachers with clear statements of Catholic teaching in a language appropriate to teachers in order to assist them in the presentation of Catholic teaching in their classrooms.

Australian Religious Education: Facing the Challenges – (AREFC) – 1999

In the Foreword to the most recent Australian document, Bishop Barry Collins, secretary of the Bishops' Committee for Education, writes in a manner that equates religious education with instruction in the faith:

The Bishops' Committee for Education presents this current document to the Australian teaching church to assist in its work

of offering Religious Education in a manner which is faithful to the revelation of God and appropriate to the ages and stages of faith development of those who are privileged to receive instruction in the Faith (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1999, p. 3).

As mentioned previously, religious education has had a controversial history in Australia and this is alluded to in the text. It was the hope of the Bishops that this document would bring some clarity and closure to the debate (p. 7). This document, however, exhibits the same lack of precision and interchange of language that exists in other Church documentary sources. It fails to differentiate catechetical and educational perspectives and repeats the same confusion of language present in the majority of the Roman documents.

The AREFC summarises the key principles of revelation, evangelisation and ministry within the broad mission of the Church. It states: "Religious education is a form of the ministry of the word in its own right. As an activity of evangelisation, it is a means of handing on the Christian faith" (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1999, p. 27). The document equates the term 'religious education' with catechesis and socialisation of people into faith. Furthermore, AREFC expands on what was in the GDC about the complementarity of and distinction between catechesis and religious education. It argues that:

> Religious education and catechesis are both evangelisation activities. Both contribute to the development of Christian faith, though in different ways. Each involves sharing faith, even the relating of personal experiences of faith by the teacher and the catechist (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1999, p. 30).

By arguing that religious education involves the sharing of faith, the document situates religious education in a catechetical framework but fails to articulate whether this is for the formal religious education classroom or for more general religious education activities in the school or home or parish. It also argues that:

> …religious education and catechesis differ in many ways. One is that the basic concern of religious education is learning. Its task relates to the cognitive and its objectives are educational – cognitive and affective (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1999, p. 31).

Lack of consistency of language within this document is clear:

> Secondly, religious education does not presuppose that students have Christian faith. As pointed out earlier, it can be offered to non-believers (Bishops' Committee for Education, 1999, p. 31).

This quotation contradicts the previous one. On the one hand religious education is concerned with sharing faith, but on the other hand it does not assume faith. On the whole this document fails to present an understanding of religious education that is clear, consistent or helpful to teachers.

2.7 Implications of the Church's documentary sources for this thesis

A number of key factors have emerged for this thesis from the analysis of the Church's authoritative and normative documents in religious education that have implications for the role of the REC. The major factor is that there is the potential for confusion relating to the terms 'catechesis' and 'religious education' as it is presented in the literature. As was pointed out in the four groups of documents analysed, there is a lack of consistent use and application of these terms. Terms such as 'evangelisation', 'catechesis' and 'religious instruction' are the key expressions in the various documents studied. Often they are used interchangeably. Moreover, in (REF), the terms 'pre-evangelisation' and 'pre-catechesis' are added to the list. In the Australian context, the difficulty has been amplified because in school contexts the dominant term is 'religious education'. The generality of the usage of this term to include the catechetical and educational dimensions raises problems. On the one hand, the flexibility of the term enables ease of use and provides a ready means for conversation, both professionally and educationally. However, its flexibility and breadth of interpretation also mean that for religious education teachers and RECs it is difficult to arrive at a precise meaning for 'religious education'. This raises the questions: What are RECs coordinating when they coordinate religious education? Is this work primarily catechetical or educational?

As will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, there is not just one setting for religious education activities in Catholic secondary schools. It will be argued that there are three distinct strands of religious education in school. The first strand is the religious education curriculum as it is taught in specified religious education classes. The second is the religious education curriculum outside the classroom (e.g., school liturgies). Finally there is the religious education curriculum as it is embedded in the

overall dimensions of school policy and day-to-day practices within the school. Clearly, when used broadly, the term 'religious education' can cover all three strands, but the purpose and the nature of religious education as it pertains to the three strands is not the same, and there is a need to delineate what religious education means in all three. Consequently, to borrow terms from the Church documents and apply them to all three strands of religious education in schools can result in a lack of clarity. For example, if 'catechesis' is the theoretical base for the development of the school's sacramental and liturgical practices, then this would be appropriate. However, to insist that 'catechesis' is also to be used as the theoretical base for classroom religious education may not be appropriate in all circumstances.

Another factor of major importance in the analysis of the Church documents as they relate to this thesis is the very nature of the documents. Regardless of the type of document or their primary purpose, they are all perceived as relevant and important in the development of a theory of religious education for Catholic school. These documents are used as the basis for the development of religious education guidelines in the various dioceses in Australia. At the local school level, they are used both in the construction of school mission and vision statements that delineate the nature of the Catholic school and in the formulation of religious education policy. In addition these documents are used in professional development and in-service activities offered by Catholic Education Offices. Rarely articulated in these guidelines and professional development activities is the fact that that these documents do not have the same purpose and are often not addressed to schools, except in limited ways. There is little distinction made between the four groupings of documents and the purposes of the documents. In the Australian context, the REF is mentioned in almost every set of religious education guidelines in every diocese. Yet it is overlooked, or deemed unimportant, that this document was written for the Italian Church and for an Italian Catholic school system that is vastly different from the Australian context. This indiscriminate use of the documents and the overlooking of their constitutive elements is not appropriate when it comes to developing a theory of religious education for Australian Catholic schools. This results in difficulties for RECs' work with religious education teachers and school communities in articulating the nature and purpose of religious education.

Furthermore, the language used in all the documents analysed in this chapter, even those primarily with educational contexts in mind, is highly ecclesial and theological, using what was referred to in the chapter as "church language". As

elaborated in the Australian work of Malone (1990), Engebretson (1995) and Welbourne (1995), among the majority of both those preparing for teaching religious education and those already teaching there is little understanding of the Church's documents. This results in an impoverished and uncritical understanding of an appropriate religious education theory for Catholic schools. In addition, it raises serious questions about the theoretical base for curriculum development and the teaching and learning processes within religious education in the classroom. Teachers' uncritical acceptance of the documents on the one hand, combined with lack of attention given to them on the other, means that the operative religious education theory that exists is based on sources other than the Church documents.

The catechetical framework and ecclesial context of these documents raise particular issues for schools. Distinctions between the activities of the Church and the activities of a school need to be made clear. Schools need to be viewed primarily and fundamentally as places of education and not catechesis. Certainly, there are connections between school and Church, but these connections should not result in the substitution of one for the other. An analysis of the contemporary documentary tradition of the Church highlights two divergent dimensions of religion education theory in relation to Catholic schools. The first dimension proposes a catechetical approach to religious education and implies a dialogue between believers that is lived out in a faith community. An educational dimension of religious education separates catechesis from the teaching and learning that occurs in the religious education curriculum in Catholic school religious education classrooms.

The documents have implications for the RECs in this thesis. Most significantly these Church documents have become the major theological framework within which central diocesan authorities have structured religious education curricula. As has been argued, the language in the Church documents is not always consistent. When these documents are then used as a basis for school material there is the possibility for confusion.

Chapter Three

Theories of religious education for Catholic schools

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to build on the theoretical framework of religious education presented in Chapter Two which analysed the theoretical perspectives of religious education that were developed in primary source Catholic documents. This chapter now builds on that, integrating it with the work of Australian and international scholars in the field of religious education. They have been chosen because their work has been influential in the development of religious education in Australian Catholic schools and on the perceptions that RECs have about religious education and their role.

3.2 Dimensions of the religious education curriculum in Catholic secondary schools

Three strands of religious education

As a predicate to an analysis of theoretical approaches to religious education that are present in the literature, there is a need to clarify various dimensions of religious education as they operate within Catholic secondary school settings in Australia. The religious education curriculum in a Catholic school has three main strands or contexts, and each of these strands has its own distinct qualities. The first strand is the classroom curriculum. Classes of religious education, at any given year level, in Catholic secondary schools normally constitute two to four hours per week. During these classes there is a structured curriculum, with teaching and learning practices similar to those used in other subjects within the total school curriculum. The second strand of the religious education curriculum occurs outside the weekly classes of religious education and involves a range of other religious activities such as school retreats, reflection days, liturgies, prayer groups and social justice projects. Depending upon the student's age level and in keeping with school policy, some or all of these activities may be compulsory and some may be voluntary. These activities have a different purpose from the structured religious education classroom teaching and have potentially different outcomes.

The third strand of the religious education curriculum is the overall religious dimension of the school, which may include working with parents and staff not directly engaged in the teaching of religious education. It is often the shared responsibility of the REC and the Principal to explain to parents all that is being attempted in religious education across the whole of the school. In addition, within the school the REC is generally on the school administration or leadership team. The management teams in Catholic secondary schools are variously called the 'administrative teams' or 'leadership teams' and comprise the Principal, Deputy Principal, REC and Curriculum Coordinator. On these teams, issues such as school policy in relation to enrolment, pastoral care of students, assessment and evaluation policies in all curriculum areas, appointment and promotion of staff are discussed. As a member of a team it is the role of the REC to advance the religious dimension of these matters.

In the school setting the REC works across these three strands: the classroom religious education program; the extra classroom program; the general religious education dimension of the school. Therefore, RECs perceptions of the role incorporate the three strands across which the REC works and that particular components, or perspectives of theories, may be more applicable to one strand than to others. To suggest that one theory of religious education covers all strands fails to address the nuances and diversifications that are constitutive of the role. Figure 3.1 represents these strands.

Figure 3.1 Three strands of religious education
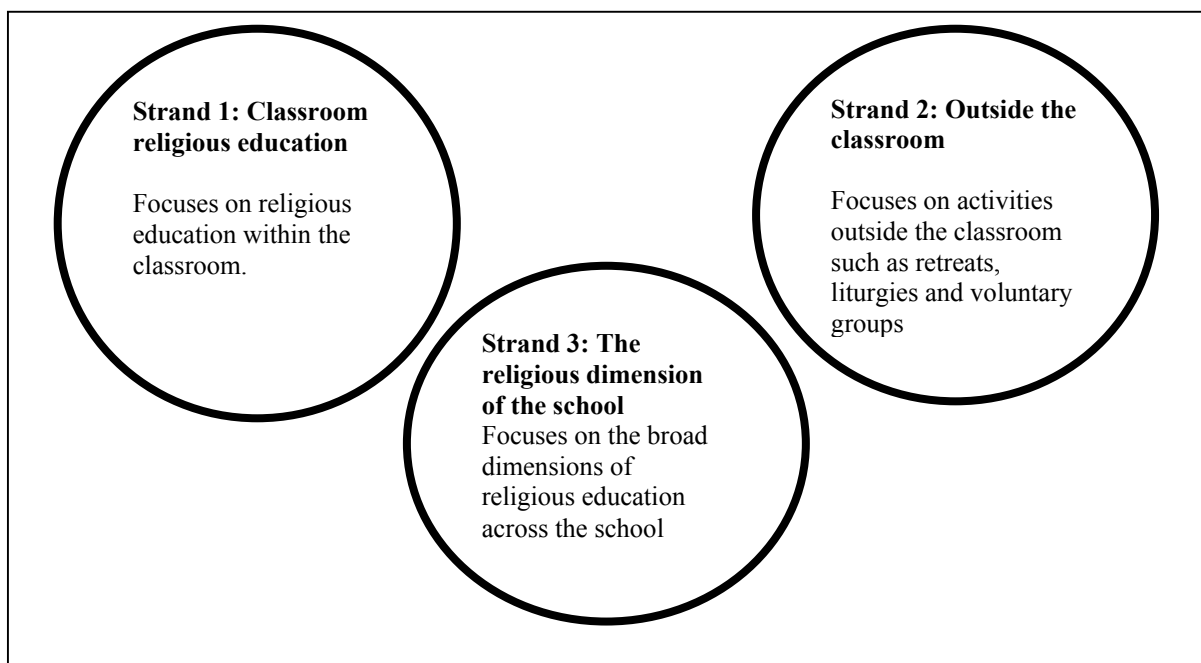
Operative meaning of the term 'religious education' in Catholic schools

The term 'religious education' is used in Australian Catholic schools to cover the three strands described above. Church documents analysed in Chapter Two illustrated a number of terms used for religious education. Most common were the terms evangelisation, catechesis, religious education and religious instruction. The lack of precision within these documents in the use of terminology has made the interpretation and application of the terms difficult. Not only are the terms themselves imprecisely used, the contexts about which they are used are not always clear or not always applicable to schools. Literature on religious education regularly refers to this problem of the use of language. Moran stated that the issue of language had reached the point where there was a crisis of religious education that emerged "from the relationship between the two words religious and education" (Moran 1971, p. 18).

Moran (1983, 1984, 1989) has been a consistent voice in the debate about the language of religious education, and the difficulties that are faced in developing a systematic and cohesive language. After a number of decades of struggle he concluded in the late 1990s:

> Despite the term's limitations, I do not know a better term in
> English to refer to all the possible relations between religion and
> education (Harris & Moran, 1998, p. 7).

Other researchers have echoed Moran's concern about the language of religious education. In the USA, Boys referred to the language issue as being "characterised by endemic confusion and conflicting directions" (Boys, 1981, p. 128). In the United Kingdom, Nichols commented on the confusion between the language of catechesis and religious education and stated that "catechesis is a square peg in this educational hole" (Nichols, 1979, p. 17). Furthermore, Nichols argued that schools could only do so much in this area:

> Schools cannot work miracles. There are some things in religious
> education which they can do well. Others lie beyond their scope.
> It is important at present to define as clearly as possible what,
> religiously speaking, the school can reasonably be expected to
> achieve. Beyond that, we must mobilize the other educational
> potential of our Church, which is very considerable. We must try

to involve the whole of our Church community in the task of religious education. It is as a contribution to this larger strategy that I hope that this consideration of the limits and possibilities of religion as a classroom subject may be of some value (Nichols 1979, p. 49).

In the 1980s Scott, a fellow countryman of Nichols, argued:

Religious educators, however, cannot agree on the words to use. They have no consistent linguistic discourse. No stable pattern of conversation is currently operative in this field (Scott, 1982, p. 558).

In the Australian context also, the need for clarity of language in relation to religious education in Church documents was articulated by Needham (1972) while working at the National Pastoral Institute in Melbourne. Many people who were preparing for the role of REC, or who were current RECs enrolled for a year of study at this Institute, were students of Needham's.

Two decades later Engebretson (1995), a lecturer in religious education at Australian Catholic University with responsibility for training teachers of religious education, confronted similar problems:

One of the problems encountered by any researcher or writer in the field of Religious Education is the problem of terminology (Engebretson, 1995, p. 42).

At the Catholic Education Conference in Melbourne in 1994 an REC referred to the dilemma of the language that is used in religious education. He spoke from the point of view of RECs in secondary schools:

The guiding question has been what is the most appropriate way. Should it have a subject or non-subject orientation? Should it be an open inquiry or based on authority? Should the approach be a faith sharing one or look at religious or faith experience? Should it be more values education or personal development education? (Watt, 1994)

Clearly religious education is a common expression for the religious dimension of the life of the Catholic school.

It is also clear that the term has a diversity of meaning. The many layers of meaning provide richness and texture upon which teachers of religious education and

RECs can draw as they develop an operative meaning of religious education within their school. On the other hand, its diversity can lead to a lack of clarity about what is meant by religious education. Figure 3.2 (p. 55) highlights some of the ways in which religious education has been described during over the past thirty years.

Figure 3.2 Definitions of religious education

This analysis suggests, in conclusion, that religious education, insofar as it is true to education and to religion, will entail helping others to understand in the ways appropriate to religion, and that such ways include not only the traditional academic and intellectual pursuits, but also the more experiential, ineffable and self-transcending ways of understanding appropriate to and characteristic of religion and religious (Melchert, 1977, p. 352).

Religious education activity is a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression (Groome, 1980, p. 22).

Religious education is the making accessible of the traditions of religious communities and the making manifest of the intrinsic connection between tradition and transformation (Boys, 1980, p. 282).

Religious education is the effort to know and experience the world of religion. Religious education does not mean leading a child or adult to faith commitment but it may contribute to a position of faith affiliation. Religious education is a meeting point between religion and education. Religious education implies a conversation between learning and the whole experience of the phenomena of religion (Treston, 1985, p. 28).

The purpose of education, and even more fundamentally of religious education, is not to prepare unquestioning and compliant cogs for the smooth running of society as it is. It is to prepare people to be constructively critical, to take responsibility, to recognize the need for change. It is to give a vision of human dignity and human purpose against which the shortcomings of any one society can be judged and in the light of which something more human can be pursued (Murray, 1986, p. 133).

Religious Education seeks to relate the living tradition of Christianity to the experience of those it teaches. In doing so Religious Education sets out to show how the Christian tradition can throw light on the burning social and political questions facing humanity (Lane, 1986, p. 158).

Religious education, then, I would see as being primarily and fundamentally, the making available of those experiences which enable growth in understanding of the religious dimension of life, where, 'understanding' encompasses perception, awareness, interpretation, and articulation of that which moves ordinary experience into the realm of religious experience, i.e., the sense of mystery, of gift, of simultaneous immanence and transcendence, the sense of ultimate meaning and value, the sense of the divine, however that may be named (Kelly, 1991, p. 25).

One task of religious education is to present the Christian religion as worthy of belief… The second task of religious education is that of communicating the contents of Christian faith, the topic highlighted in my title… The third and last function of religious education is socialization into the community of faith (Dulles, 1985, pp. 11-14).

Religious education is an intentional activity carried out in a particular way with students in Catholic Secondary Schools. Its aim is to present the message of Jesus Christ and his Church in its entirety, and in making use of the best current research, theory and practice in education, lead students to a full and rich appreciation of the Christian life (CEOM, 1995).

Terms used in the field of religious education in Australia

In Australian Catholic secondary schools the term 'religious education' is the one most commonly used. From time to time, however, and in response to different influences, other terms have been used. These other terms have had no precise starting point or end point but have been used at different periods of time. They have never replaced 'religious education' as the main term but have been used at the same time as 'religious education' was used. Figure 3.3 (p. 57) outlines these various terms.

The development of theories in religious education

Religious education materials from CEOs often reflect an approach to religious education that is an amalgam of theories found in Church documents and the conceptualisations of religious education from researchers in the field. Religious education conferences that have been held on almost an annual basis in the Archdiocese of Melbourne since the early 1970s have been the vehicle for the dissemination of these theoretical perspectives from researchers to teachers, RECs and Principals. Graduate and post-graduate courses at Australian Catholic University (and the Catholic Teachers' Colleges that preceded it) have included a study of these religious education theories in their courses.

The research of Malone (1990) and Welbourne (1995) attest to the fact that many pre-service and current teachers in Australian Catholic schools have very little understanding or appreciation of religious education theory:

> Caught in this multi-factored situation many teachers in Catholic
> schools experienced cognitive conflict and found themselves
> without the adequate philosophical and theological background
> for religious education (Welbourne, 1995, p. 6).

Consequently distinctions need to be made between religious education theory that is articulated in these documents (articulated theory of religious education) and religious education theory as is operates in the school setting (operative theory of religious education).

Figure 3.3 Terms used to describe religious education in Catholic secondary schools

Religious Education: This term refers to both the general religious education that occurs in all the dimensions of a Catholic school and also to the specific religious education curriculum that is taught within designated religious education classes. It is the most common term used in Catholic schools

Christian Doctrine: This term was used from the 1950s to the early 1970s and emphasised the need for a clear understanding of the doctrinal dimensions of the Christian faith. The primary focus was not the learner or the educational setting but rather the doctrine that needed to be understood by the learner so that they could participate in a faith community

Religious Instruction: This term, used from the 1900s to the 1950s emphasised direct teaching about the 'truths' of faith. It was associated with the Catechism and the rote learning of answers to questions of faith. It was also a term used in Government controlled schools to describe the religious education program, which was generally a study of the Bible.

Christian Living: For a short period of time in the 1970s and early 1980s this term was used to convey the importance of the purpose of the study of religion, namely, that it would result in the person leading a Christian life. The primary focus was on the individual's call to live in the way of Christ and grew out of the kerygmatic approach to religious education.

Catechesis: This term is defined as a dialogue among believers who are active members of a faith community.

Evangelization: This term refers to the proclamation of the good news to those who as yet do not believe.

Education of faith: The primary emphasis here was the leading of the person to a deeper understanding and commitment to faith in an educational context. Used from the 1970s onwards.

Religious studies: The study of religion as a religious phenomenon and often the study of religions on a comparative basis is the main emphasis of this term. It does not require an articulation of faith or a faith commitment of any dimension. In more recent years this has also been the term used to describe optional subjects available for the senior years of secondary school.

Historically the CEOM has, until recently, had an *articulated theory* of religious education that has been consistent since 1970. The religious education curriculum materials produced for use in Melbourne secondary schools assumed religious education as catechesis (theory) and proposed a life-centred approach. In 1997, under a new Archbishop, the assumption of religious education as catechesis (theory) remained, but life-centred approaches were replaced by a more knowledge-centred approach. In the Melbourne Catholic weekly magazine *Kairos,* an article appeared early in 1998 with the title "A turning point for religious education". It outlined a return to a theory of religious education in Catholic schools as catechesis, with the emphasis on knowledge rather than life experience. It stated:

> The Archdiocese of Melbourne is changing the way in which catechesis is to be imparted to its young people (Kairos, 5, April 12th 1998, p. 12).

Evidence that knowledge and doctrine had returned as the preferred approach to religious education can be found in the title of the series of student texts that were the result of the new Archbishop's initiative in religious education: *To Know, Worship and Love*.

Competing demands of religious education

Catholic schools exist within the overall mission and work of the Catholic Church. Part of the overall purpose of the Catholic school and of religious education is the promotion of the personal development of the faith of students. This has been, and always will be, a valid expectation of the role of a Catholic school while the majority of those who attend the school are baptised Catholics. There is also the need, however, to make distinctions between the overall purposes of Catholic schooling and the specific goals and purposes of the intentional religious education program that takes place within religious education classrooms. What occurs in other settings in schools, such as retreats, liturgies, voluntary prayer groups, and social-action groups, is inherently different from the compulsory classroom setting. There are links between the activities outside the classroom and those within it, but there are also differences. What may be possible and appropriate in one may not be possible or appropriate in the other. Balancing these competing demands is critical and creates ongoing challenges for the REC.

In addition, theories and pedagogies of religious education coming from within the discipline of religious education is a relatively new phenomenon. Writings

from researchers overseas (Moran 1971, 1983, 1989; Murray 1986; Boys 1989; Groome 1980, 1991; Grimmitt 1973; Goldman 1965; Smart 1973, 1975; Nichols, 1979, 1981) and from within Australia (Rummery 1975; Rossiter 1981, 1983; Lovat 1989, 1995; Malone 1982, 1990) have had the profound effect of establishing the credibility of religious education as a discipline within its own right, rather than continuing as a branch of theology or catechesis. Religious education established as a discipline in its own right is the interplay of many other disciplines:

> Religious Education is a hybrid discipline which draws on all the areas involved in the study of religion in a general or a specific religious education tradition, as well as all aspects of the subject, education (Malone, 1990, p. 4).

The term 'religious education' holds together the faith perspective and the educational perspective in a single term, and in school contexts, the operational meaning of the term depends upon the nature and place of the activity being undertaken. If the context is the formal classroom, then the term 'religious education' will have a different operational meaning to the term 'religious education' in the context of celebrating a Eucharist. In the day-to-day activities of the school, the teachers rarely articulate the various operational meanings of the term 'religious education'. Instead there is an acceptance among the teachers that everybody knows what is meant by the term in its various contexts.

3.3 Establishing a method for mapping the field of religious education theory

<u>The methods of Ryan and Lovat</u>

An Australian educator and researcher, Maurice Ryan, has suggested a possible framework for the mapping of theories of religious education. He surveyed the literature of religious education and argued that three rival conceptions of curriculum were being translated in the religious education classroom. He calls these conceptions of curriculum "catechetical, educational and phenomenological" (Ryan, 1999, p. 19). The catechetical refers to the conception of the religious education curriculum as leading people to faith, or that religious education is primarily catechesis. Educational conceptions of religious education emphasise the grounding of religious education in educational theory. Finally, the phenomenological conception of religious education treats the study of religious education as a phenomenon of society and culture. Ryan's

work links with that of Lovat, who divided the landscape of religious education into three models: the specific or Faith-forming models where "the overall goal is to convince, convert or strengthen commitment" (Lovat, 1989, p. 1); the Inter-faith models, which aim at greater understanding of the world without any interest in evangelising; and the Integrated model, which as its title suggests brings together a critical dialectic of the faith components of religion and the role that religion plays in the world.

Figure 3.4 Comparison of approaches to religious education used by Ryan and Lovat

Ryan		Lovat
Catechetical	⟷	Faith-forming models
Educational	⟷	Integrated
Phenomenological	⟷	Inter-faith
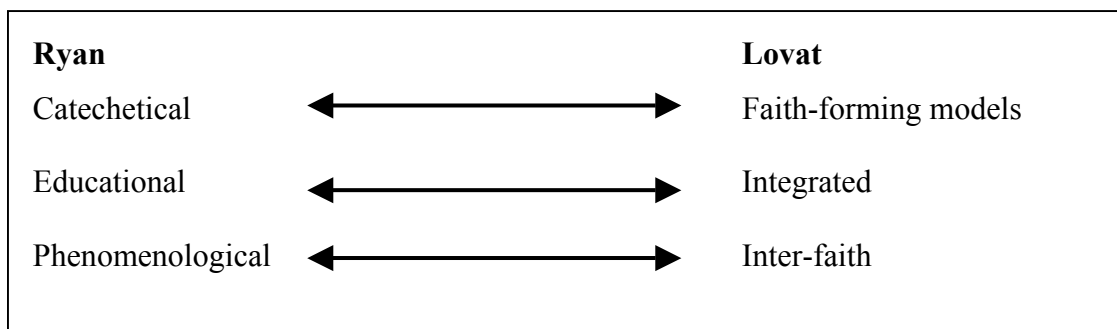
The distinction made by Rossiter

Rossiter (1981) argued that one way of mapping the field of religious education was to consider two viewpoints on religious education. The first viewpoint considers religious education from the perspective of a faith-sharing community. Rossiter called this "education in faith". In this perspective the "teacher is concerned with handing on a religious faith" (Rossiter, 1981, p. 4). The second viewpoint considered religious education from the perspective of education. Rossiter called this "education in religion". In this perspective the "study of religion is contributing to the general education of students" (Rossiter, 1982, p. 5).

Difficulties with any mapping

The difficulty with any mapping and categorisation of theories is that there is an emphasis on what divides the theories from one another and not on where they overlap. Also there is the difficulty of getting a precise fit between the category and the theorists. For example, Thomas Groome (1980, 1991, 1998) emphasises that faith education is an aspect of religious education. Groome argues that faith education needs to be undertaken within an educational framework. Therefore, to argue that Groome is primarily catechetical does not recognise the complex balance of catechesis and

education that is central to his thinking. Without resolving this difficulty, the following figure (Figure 3.5) outlines, for the purpose of this thesis, the way in which this researcher has attempted to map the field of religious education and the order in which the analysis of the mapping has proceeded.

Figure 3.5 Three fields in religious education
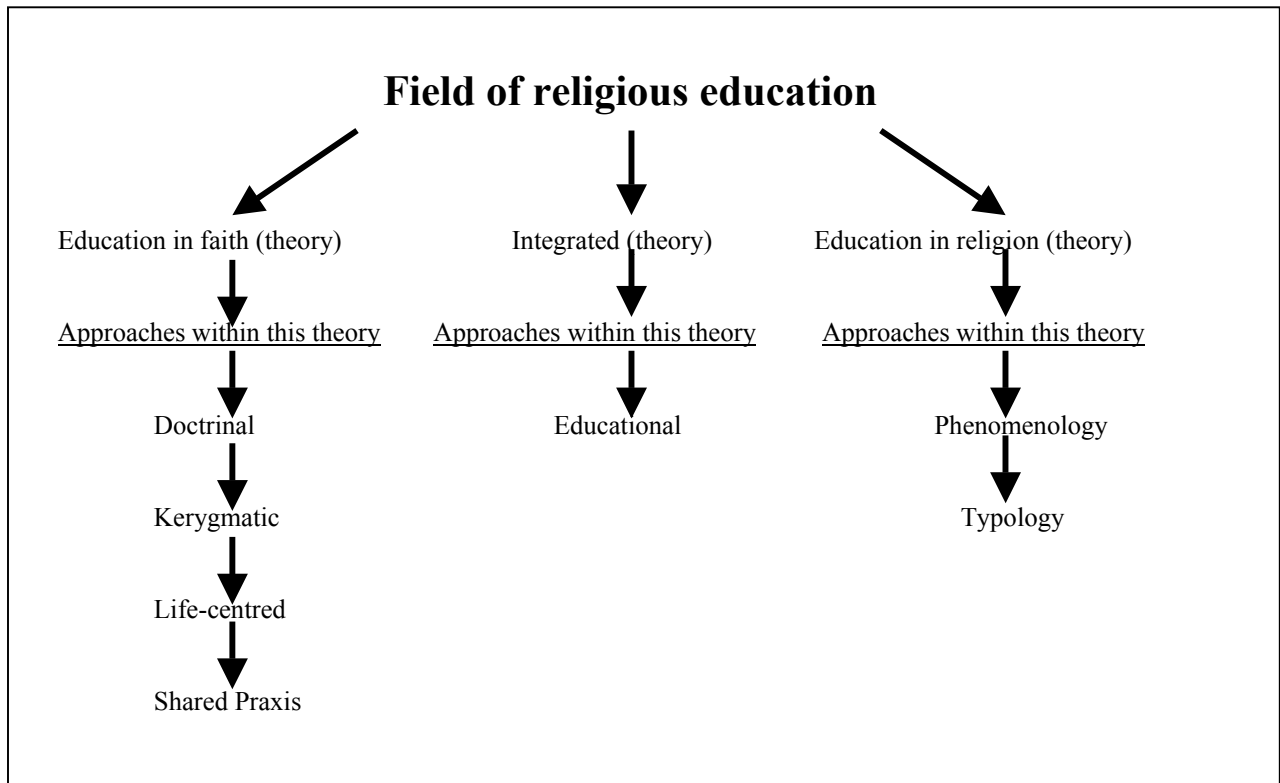
3.4 A theory of religious education as education in faith (catechesis)

The catechetical theory of religious education places an emphasis on the development of the faith lives of the students (and teachers). It is based upon a view that the school is a community of faith and that the activities that take place there are akin to what happens in the life of local parishes and families. Passing on of the tradition, with the aim of encouraging students to become committed to the person of Jesus and to the Church, are central features of this theory. This theory of religious education as catechesis is predicated upon the assumption that those who participate, both students and teachers, are willingly engaging in a dialogue among believers for the purpose of deepening faith. In this theory there is little or no difference between religious education and catechesis. The two are viewed as synonymous.

Within this theory of religious education as catechesis there are four key approaches analysed: Doctrinal; Kerygmatic; Life-centred and Shared Praxis. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

The doctrinal approach to religious education as catechesis

The Government of Victoria, followed by other state governments, legislated the separation of state and church school systems in the *Free, Secular & Compulsory Education Act, 1872*. Even before this Act, and made more pronounced after it, Churches (Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic) were responsible for the total cost of operating a separate educational system from the state. The decision by the Catholic Bishops in the late nineteenth century to continue with a separate school system, and not join in the benefits of a State-funded education, was based on considerations stronger than economics and education. In a time of intense religious bigotry in Australia (O'Farrell, 1977), the decision involved defence of Catholicism itself. The decision was not made primarily on educational grounds, but was based on a desire to control all aspects of the life of Church's followers. The maintaining of a separate Catholic schooling system had as its primary goal the preserving of the faith of Catholic families (Flynn, 1979, pp. 53-55) and the Catholic Church itself.

A decade earlier in the 1860s, the First Vatican Council had repeated the call for the Church to be separate from the world, and to hold on to the truths of the One Holy Roman Catholic Church. The Council called for a renewed reliance on doctrine and truth by its members. This call emerged from the concern for the Church to be recognised as the source of truth at a time in the world when uncertainties about Catholicism were high. It was in this climate, and with this agenda, that the Council articulated, for the first time in the history of the Church, the doctrine of infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith and morals. It is within these two historical contexts, one international and the other national, that the emphasis on the surety of doctrine as the approach to religious education in Australian Catholic schools needs to be interpreted.

The general title used for religious education from 1900 to the 1960s in Catholic and State schools in Australia was 'religious instruction'. In the Catholic tradition, this title indicates that the emphasis was on instruction in the beliefs and doctrines of the Church. Knowledge of the faith helped promote the faith. Instruction was the pedagogical method used to present the doctrinal truths of the faith tradition of

the Catholic Church. The promotion of the faith of believers (catechesis) for the purposes of passing on the tradition of faith within a faith community of Church was also assumed to be the aim of religious instruction in Catholic schools:

> Catechesis is a Catholic term that refers to the process of sharing or passing on of the faith tradition and assumes that all participants belong to the Church at some level or belief or intent. All the Roman documents operate out of a catechetical frame of reference (Malone, 1990, p. 35).

Given the tumultuous nature of the educational debate in the late nineteenth century in Australia, and the position of the Church within the culture of that time, it was understandable that religious instruction was the approach taken by Catholic schools.

Religious education as understood within the doctrinal approach was presented in a curriculum that was based almost entirely on the Catechism. Catechisms were many and varied and contained concise statements of essential beliefs and practices of Catholics. In 1937 the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, issued a *Catholic Catechism for General Use*, which was a small pocket size catechism. In 1939 Fr Matthew Beovich, Director of the CEOM, produced a *Companion to the Catechism* which was to be used to assist in instruction in religious education in school. Other catechisms were produced for adults. Common to these were collections of prayers such as the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Morning Offering and the Act of Contrition. Perhaps the most striking feature was the question and answer format of the catechisms, where the key doctrinal formulations of the Catholic Church in relation to God, Jesus, Church, Mary, Sin, Heaven, Hell and Sacraments were set out with short questions and answers that could then be memorised.

The rote learning of the doctrine was assumed to lead to belief and socialisation into the Catholic Church. The Foreword in the 1939 *Primer Catechism for Use in Junior Grades* in the Archdiocese of Melbourne gives directions to the religious education teachers about this question and answer format:

> While all questions and answers are to be studied and not merely read, only those in heavy print are to be completely memorized…
> No memorizing should be attempted until the meaning is grasped by the children (Mannix 1939, Foreword).

As an indication of the importance of this doctrinal approach to religious education in schools, the four dioceses in Victoria in 1950 produced a combined *Religious Instruction Syllabus*. This was the first time that the four dioceses had collaborated on such an undertaking. One of the main features of this common syllabus was "a fresh doctrine text for each year" (Catholic Education Office, 1950, p. 2). The syllabus clearly articulated the central intention of the doctrinal emphasis when it outlined the purpose of religious education:

> There are, of necessity, numerous topics in the Syllabus, but whatever matter is being studied, there are three leading and correlated ideas that should always stand out in the minds of the children: personal devotion to Christ; loyalty to His Church; love of the Holy Mass (Catholic Education Office, 1950, p. 3).

At the intermediate class level (fifteen year olds) the doctrinal topics set down for particular study in this Syllabus were: the True Church, the Commandments of God and Church, the Incarnation and Redemption, Grace and the Sacramental System, Penance, Eucharist, Matrimony, the Mass, the Last Things (Catholic Education Office, 1950, p. 15).

The memorising of doctrine as a means to the internalisation of faith and commitment to the Catholic Church was the key element in this approach and dominated the landscape of religious education until the 1960s.

The kerygmatic approach to religious education as catechesis

The doctrinal approach remained strong in Australian until the 1960s. Different emphases in religious education, however, had been expressed in Europe for many years before. An Austrian Jesuit, Josef Jungmann (1936), was the architect of the kerygmatic approach and his pupil and fellow Jesuit, Johannes Hofinger, visited Australia in the early 1960s, bringing Jungmann's work to Australian consciousness. Jungmann's work represents a turning point for religious education (Moran, 1966a, p. 20).

Jungmann's 1936 work *Die Frohbotschaft und Unsere Glaubensverkundigung (The Good News and Our Proclamation of the Faith)*, although influential in Europe, was not translated into English until 1962. In this groundbreaking work, some thirty years before Vatican II and the document on the *Church in the*

Modern World (1965), Jungmann argued that the proclamation of the message of Jesus Christ was the approach that needed to be followed. The Greek word for proclaiming the message is *kerygma,* from which the term 'kerygmatic' is derived.

As early as 1936 Jungmann had pointed out that a weakness in the doctrinal approach was that it was not related to people's lives:

> …religious teaching today cannot content itself with the mere handing on of hereditary formulas, nor can it assume, as once it did, that the traditional sums of customs, devotions, pious thoughts and practices, even intensively used, will avail to hold the faithful firmly in the Church (Jungmann, 1962, p. 7).

The knowledge emphasis of the doctrinal approach was supplemented by an orientation towards Jesus. In the kerygmatic approach "doctrine must be known; the kerygma must be proclaimed" (Jungmann, 1962, p. 34). Jungmann attempted to build bridges between instruction and knowledge and the lives of the children and proposed that the driving components of this approach to religious education were Scripture and liturgy. Scripture recorded the life and work of the person of Jesus and his message was to be proclaimed and celebrated in liturgy.

The central content of the kerygma was "Christ, Redemption, Grace, the sacraments" (Jungmann, 1962, p. 96). As his student Hofinger stated, the central difference between the doctrinal and the kerygmatic approaches was the person of Christ:

> The important point which must bear special emphasis is this: the kerygma is not so much a body of doctrines as it is a Person. Christ is the kerygma (Hofinger & Reedy, 1962, p. 20).

The work that Jungmann commenced was continued by Hofinger, who organised six international study weeks on catechetics between 1959 and 1968, (Nijmegen 1959, Eichstatt 1960, Bangkok 1962, Katigoondo 1964, Manila 1967, Medellin 1968). These attracted Bishops, catechists, specialists in catechetics and missionaries.

In an article on these weeks, Erdozain traced the catechetical movement and highlighted the basic concept of the kerygmatic approach:

> Today's world requires a new look at the faith we are proclaiming. For preaching and catechetics to get back to their

original forms, one must return to first principles, to what constitutes the true kernel of the Christian message, the kerygma (Erdozain, 1970, p. 11).

Religious educators in Australia were introduced to the kerygmatic approach, with its emphasis on Scripture, in a new style Catechism written substantially by Fr John F. Kelly, who was appointed Director of the CEOM in 1955. The lessons in this Catechism were set out in a stepwise pattern and retained the familiar question and answer method of the previous Catechisms. However, the content "used the kerygmatic approach" (Malone, 1982, p. 8). The content was no longer doctrine but the proclamation of the person of Jesus.

A teacher's book and a student book accompanied Book Two of the Catechism. Evidence of the impact of the kerygmatic approach is seen in the title of the three major sections of the Catechism, which were taken from John's gospel: I am the truth, I am the life, I am the way (John 14:6). A further indication of the kerygmatic basis was that almost all of the 127 chapters in the student text have a scriptural text underneath the title, e.g., "Chapter 27. Jesus Was Rejected. (St John 19:1-16)'. In addition the chapters generally commence with a paraphrase of a scriptural story. The beginning of Chapter 27 states:

> St John, writing many years after the death of Jesus, said, "He came to what was His own, and they who were His own gave Him no welcome". Jesus preached and worked His miracles among His people mostly in Galilee. His success among them was such that He drew crowds to the desert, even for days at a time (Australian Hierarchy, 1963, p. 71-72).

Central to this approach was a change in content while the purpose remained the same as the doctrinal approach, namely, the imparting of knowledge. It had catechetical intentions, aiming to engage in a dialogue of believers. The content, however, of this approach was the person of Jesus. Jesus the Christ was the kerygma, the proclamation. The assumption in this approach was that the focus of Jesus as God, as presented in Scripture, would lead to a life of faith in the community of the Church, just as in the doctrinal model.

The life-centred approach to religious education as catechesis

There were two main springboards for the life-centred approach to catechesis. In the Catholic Church the springboard was theological and came from the formulation of the doctrine of Revelation (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, 1965*). This understanding of revelation stressed that God was revealed in people and in the events of life. Vatican II reinforced that God was revealed in Scripture and Tradition. There was also renewed emphasis on God as revealed in the here and now (Dei Verbum, 1965, par. 7). Religious education integrated these broad understandings of God's revelation into a new emphasis in religious education that had life experience as the focus. The importance of Vatican II for religious education is clear:

> Any discussion of the developments in religious education over the past thirty years needs to be placed against a backdrop of the aftermath of Vatican II (De Souza, 1999, p. 15).

The life-centred approach, like the doctrinal and kerygmatic, was catechetical in intention. It emphasised that only through an examination of life could believers enter into an understanding and encounter with God.

The second springboard for the life-centred approach came from educational sources that realigned religious education with developments in the psychological understanding of young people. It drew upon understandings of the human person from the science of anthropology. Foremost in the effort to understand and develop the importance of the doctrine of Revelation for religious educators was the work of Gabriel Moran, an American theologian and educator. Moran (1966) argued that the human sciences and what they contributed to the understanding of life were important in articulating a theology of revelation. His two early works in 1966, *Theology of Revelation* and *Catechesis of Revelation*, were both revolutionary and foundational in the application of this theology of revelation to catechesis.

Key to the work of Moran was the description of the Church as the community of believers and it was in this community that "God is now revealing himself [*sic*]" (Moran, 1966a, p. 14). Not abandoning this position, but pointing to a weakness that developed over time in the kerygmatic approach, Moran argued that a focus on God's revelation in the life of people did not mean that a vigorous intellectual approach

in religious education was not required or possible. On the contrary, he was critical of approaches to religious education that were not undertaken with intellectual rigour:

> What has been most painfully lacking and what is most desperately needed is some intellectual seriousness and competence in the teaching of religion (Moran, 1996a, p. 35).

As is pointed out later in this chapter, the lack of intellectual rigour in the delivery of the life-centred approach was the major cause of it being overtaken by the educational approach.

The contribution of Nebreda and Amalorpavadass to the life-centred approach to religious education

Australia's approach to religious education using a life-centred theory was strongly influenced by two significant international voices. Fathers Nebreda and Amalorpavadass. These educationalists were members of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI). Some members of the religious education staff at Catholic Education Office in Melbourne who were key personnel in the development of the *Guidelines* studied at the EAPI (Malone, 1992). Furthermore, both Nebreda and Amalorpavadass were frequent speakers at Australian National Conferences on Catechetics and both were involved in the International study weeks on Catechetics (1970s). Working as they did in Asia, in a non-Christian environment, they became aware of the inadequacy of the term 'catechesis' to describe their work. They preferred the terms 'pre-evangelisation' and 'pre-catechesis' as stages prior to evangelisation and catechesis. Catechesis was used almost exclusively by the Catholic tradition to describe one particular form of religious education. For Nebreda religious education was something that occurred most genuinely at the pre-evangelisation and pre-catechesis stage, a stage of free searching prior to the dialogue of faith and commitment. Catechesis was essentially Christocentric (Nebreda, 1965a, 1965b).

Amalorpavadass, in particular, had a strong influence on the structure of *The Guidelines for Religious Education* (1974, 1977, 1984, 1995) He developed an anthropological view of religious education, which involved an understanding of the whole person and was based on the doctrine of Revelation from Vatican II. Religious education and theology, he claimed, required sensitivity to life in all its dimensions:

> If you want to find God, if you want to know the essence of God,
> you must look for it here and now in our world, in our history, in
> our life situations (Amalorpavadass, 1973a, p. 15).

Amalorpavadass declared that God speaks primarily through life and events as well as doctrine and authority. In his address to the 1973 National Catechetical Seminar in Melbourne, he stated:

> Catechetical pedagogy is based on the one hand on theology and
> all its sources, and on the other hand, on anthropology, on all the
> human and behavioural sciences. Hence we shall study the
> theological and anthropological basis of catechetical pedagogy.
> The process of the education of faith is to be patterned therefore
> on the one hand on the very process of revelation and faith, and
> on the other hand on that of the triple dynamics of personality
> development, group life, and mankind's (*sic*) historical adventure
> (Amalorpavadass, 1973b, p. 9).

Amalorpavadass presented his catechetical pedagogy as being based on a theological approach, and on the findings of the human and behavioural sciences. This provided a framework within which religious education could be approached from an educational point of view and not simply in terms of religious language (Malone, 1982, p. 100).

Goldman and the life-centred approach in the United Kingdom

Ronald Goldman, an English educational psychologist, explored the psychological basis for religious education and how educational theories and practice could inform the field of religious education. His contribution to the life-centred approach to religious education deserves consideration. His work was grounded in non-confessional[4] schools that were not bound to any particular religious belief or commitment. He explored the meaning that religious education needed to include for students in non-confessional schools. In addition to addressing a different context for religious education, Goldman used new sciences, in particular psychology, to justify his argument for a life-centred approach.

Goldman's foundational work was presented in *Readiness for Religion*, written in 1965. The subtitle "A Basis for Developmental Religious Education" points to the insights that his work had for religious education. He argued for a change in the understanding of religious education:

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[4] Confessional refers to those schools that profess and are associated with a particular religious belief. Non-confessional refers to those schools without those links.

> The emphasis of this book moves away from older authoritarian methods of teaching to methods involving personal participation by the child so that he is encouraged to find out for himself (Goldman, 1965, p. xi).

The British approach to teaching religious education in state (county) schools, with an almost total reliance upon Scripture, Goldman claimed, was inadequate. He argued for moving away from the Bible as the central content:

> …to a content which more closely approximates to the real world of the children, using their experiences and their natural development rather than imposing an adult form of religious ideas and language upon them (Goldman, 1965, p. 9).

Goldman did not come from the Catholic tradition, but there are elements in his work that support the ideas of Jungmann, Hofinger, Amalorpavadass and Nebreda. Goldman, however, did not arrive at his theory through theology but through educational psychology:

> Religious growth is not something separate from the rest of a child's development. It is an interpretation of all his experiences, which he relates to what he believes to be the nature of the divine (Goldman, 1965, p. 26).

He argued that religious education was not external to the life of the child. On the contrary, the very essence of all religious education, whether in a confessional or non-confessional setting, was filled with God. In fact, for Goldman, all learning was to be imbued with this religious dimension:

> Beginning with a very generalised experience and working forward into more specific ideas, I would lead children to integrate all they are learning and doing in all subjects within a world view of God as creator and as the person who cares about his *(sic)* people (Goldman, 1965, p. 197).

Religious education aims at influencing life. The memorising of propositional statements of doctrine and theology and the accumulation of knowledge about Scripture were inappropriate as the primary means and starting point of religious education.

Life-centred emphasis in the *Guidelines for Religious Education* in Melbourne

The life-centred approach to religious education grew out of insights in theology, education, psychology and philosophy of education. Evidence of the life-

centred approach to religious education, within a theory of catechesis, is contained in the *Guidelines* from the CEOM. These *Guidelines* were the authorised religious education materials that inform the curriculum to be constructed and taught by the RECs in Catholic schools. Life-centred aspects of the theology of Revelation became incorporated in the *Guidelines* in all of its editions (1974, 1977, 1984, 1995). The 1977 *Guidelines* contain a range of learning objectives that are linked to major concepts. Concept 2 states ones of those objectives as being "to appreciate that God's saving action is shown in the everyday lives of people" (CEOM, 1977, p. 43). The introductory section to the 1984 *Guidelines* states that "it is important, too, to reflect that any meeting with the Word of God takes place within the realities of each person's life journey" (CEO, 1984, p. 7).

In addition, the aspects of the learning process in the religious education curriculum state that students' are invited to reflect upon and extended their "knowledge and understanding of the wider human experience as described in literature, art, music, films etc" (CEOM, 1984, p. 146). Amalorpavadass's contribution to the theology and philosophy of life-centred catechesis has already been examined, and in his address to the 1973 National Convention of Catechesis in Melbourne he proposed:

> But what is common to every catechesis is that there is a movement, a certain procedure, and there are definite steps. So we can roughly distinguish three stages in every movement of catechesis. First of all, invocation of a human experience, reflection on it and interpretation of its significance at every human level to the point of exhausting that. Secondly, interpretation of its fuller meaning and ultimate fulfilment in the light of God's Word. Thirdly, with the discovery and relevance of the word to life, to review and relive the human experience in full consonance with God's plan to whom we surrender ourselves (Amalorpavadass, 1973b p. 8).

These principles were translated into a four-point methodological process of the *Guidelines*. The four-point process is: experience shared, reflection deepened, faith expressed and insights reinforced. The explanation of the process and its relation to the life-centred approach is given in the curriculum section of the *Guidelines:*

> The catechetical process utilises all the aspects of the drama of human life, respecting them all deeply, moving with the rhythm of life which they provide. Hence, it is difficult to mark off the process absolutely clearly, as if to tie it down to regulated times, occasions, dynamics and routines. There are, however, elements

in the process which can be described as: **EXPERIENCE SHARED, REFLECTION DEEPENED, FAITH EXPRESSED,** and **INSIGHTS REINFORCED.** Catechesis is a process of constant movement among these elements, frequently returning to life experience and reflecting on it. The teacher participates in the process with the students (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1995, p. 27).

Other religious education materials based on this approach, such as *Come Alive* for senior students and *Move Out* for junior secondary students, required that the teacher be skilled in open-ended, seemingly content-free, life-centred religious education curriculum. Teaching in this way was not part of the training of the teachers (Malone, 1990, p. 58) and gave rise to frustrations and criticisms on the part of teachers, students and parents.

One of the positive outcomes of the life-centred approach, however, was an emphasis on personal development within religious education. The introduction of this approach in schools in the 1970s and the subsequent growth of camps and retreats reflect the concern to engage students on a personal level with issues of faith and commitment. In these activities the focus was on the place that God had in the lives of students. They drew upon the lives of the students as the starting point of catechesis. But by the early 1980s the life-centred catechesis lost favour as the central theoretical basis for religious education because it was judged to be theologically and educationally inadequate (Welbourne, 1995, p. 5). Life-centred approaches had become almost content free. Nevertheless, it is essential to understand the foundational place this theory and approach to religious education had on religious education teachers and RECs.

Shared praxis approach to religious education as catechesis

Thomas Groome, an American Catholic theologian and educator, developed one of the most recent approaches to religious education as catechesis. His major works (1980, 1991, 1998) have made an important contribution to religious education in the Western world. Groome's focus has been on the reconceptualising of religious education within the Christian faith tradition, but in such a way as to overcome the inadequacies of the doctrinal and life-centred approaches. In his first major work, *Christian Religious Education*, he introduced the term 'shared praxis' as a way of understanding religious education. Praxis, as used by Groome, is critical reflection on practice. Shared praxis is based heavily upon the work of Freire (1970, 1973) and Habermas (1971, 1973). In

shared praxis Groome balances three issues: What is it to know? What is past knowledge and tradition? What are the needs of current society and the learner?

Groome defined shared praxis in this way:

> Christian religious education by shared praxis can be described as a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith (Groome, 1980, p. 184).

Groome's praxis takes a philosophical and educational position on religious education. It offers a religious education model that combines the intention of education in faith with sound educational and theological links (De Souza, 1999, p. 40). Shared praxis then is a combination of theology and education and "accommodates both religious education and intentional catechesis" (Welbourne, 1995, p. 95). The structure of shared praxis is outlined in five movements. It is through the movement of these steps that religious education can take place: naming the present action; the participants' Stories and Vision; the Community Story and Vision; dialectic hermeneutic between the Story and the Participants' Stories; dialectical hermeneutic between the Vision and the Participants' Vision.

For Groome, the term 'Christian religious education' specifies the context within which he is working, and names the tradition out of which he is writing. He defines religious education as "a deliberate attending to the transcendental dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression" (Groome, 1980, p. 22). He situates catechesis "within the broader enterprise of Christian religious education" (Groome, 1980, p. 27). Christian religious education, for Groome:

> …calls for a way of knowing that can hold past, present, and future in a fruitful tension, that fosters free and freeing lived Christian faith, that promotes a creative relationship with a Christian community and that community with the world (1980, p. 149).

The impact of Groome on the construction of a theory of religious education that is valid for Catholic schools in Australia has been considerable and positive (Bezzina, Gahan, McLenaghan & Wilson, 1997). The high profile of his works in tertiary courses and in-service programs and school curricula has challenged "teachers of religion to debate and

ask serious questions about an appropriate epistemology for their discipline" (Welbourne, 1995, p. 123). He has visited Australia and been influential in his work with Principals of Catholic schools. Furthermore, many Australians have attended the Institute of Religious Education and Ministry at Boston College and taken courses with him, and a number of Australian religious education researchers have also studied with him. In addition, in the New South Wales diocese of Parramatta (CEO Parramatta, 1992), shared praxis has been used as the underlying methodology and approach to religious education in their religious education guidelines.

However, there has not been universal acceptance of Groome's work in Australian Catholic education circles. There has been some criticism of the validity and suitability of the shared praxis approach for formal classroom religious education (Rossiter 1988; Lovat 1991; Ryan & Malone 1996; Raduntz 1994). Some of the major criticisms relate to the presupposition of belief and commitment on the part of the participants and whether the model is better suited to adult faith and church parish settings. Malone argues that shared praxis assumes the religious commitment of the participants and that this is not necessarily valid in secondary classrooms (Malone, 1990, p. 71). These are challenging issues and point to the previously described tensions between the catechetical and education dimensions of religious education. Nevertheless, the contribution of Groome's work to religious education has been important and substantial.

3.5 Phenomenological perspective on religious education

The second category of approaches to religious education has strong connections with the work of the theorists that will be analysed in the following sections. This approach views religion as a social and cultural phenomenon that is present throughout the world. Religion needs to be studied because it is an essential component of the world as we know it. In this approach, religion is not studied for the purposes of calling people into religious experiences or for commitment to particular religions. As a phenomenon, religion exists and its various elements need to be studied if we are going to understand the role that religion occupies in our society.

<u>Smart</u>

In the UK, Ninian Smart initially proposed this approach in *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (1968). He outlined a number of dimensions of the phenomenon of religion that were present in all religions: doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, social. He also characterised religion in two divisions:

1.   Belief division: (a) doctrines; (b) myths; (c) ethical and social beliefs.
2.   Practical manifestations division: (d) rituals and practices; (e) experiences and sentiments; (f) institutions; (g) symbolism: art plus poetry (Smart, 1973, p. 45)

An educational and philosophical approach to religious education was called for, using an objective, analytical approach to the study of religion:

> Thus in the field of education we need to come to an intellectual understanding of what religion is and what the main dimensions of belief, feeling and practice are – so that in the light of this understanding a cogent educational plan can be evolved. Then, at the pedagogical level, we need to understand what elements in human (in particular young people's) experience are relevant to the religious quest. At the social and legal level: what are the bounds of religious education? How does it engage with other areas, such as moral education? (Smart, 1975, p. 13).

<u>Grimmitt</u>

Michael Grimmitt (1973), a lecturer in Religious Studies in the UK, argued that the purpose of religious education is to help students search for meaning and purpose. Students learn about life through the study of the dimensions of religion. Religious education is best taught with an existential emphasis. The point of departure for religious education method and content in their approach was individuals and their lives:

> Various considerations have determined its form and content, the most significant being the need to show the practical relevance of the Theory of Education to the task of teaching Religion in schools (Grimmitt, 1973, p. ix).

Grimmitt, like Goldman, drew on developments in areas outside the Church as a rationale for this stance. Changes in the understanding of curriculum in general needed to be applied to religious education (Grimmitt, 1973, p. 15). He argued that

religious education needed to be tested against three educational criteria: Does this subject incorporate a unique "mode of thought and awareness" which is "worthwhile" to man's understanding of himself and his situation? Does this subject serve to widen and deepen the child's cognitive perspective in a unique way and so contribute to his total development as a person? Can this subject be taught in ways which ensure understanding and actively foster the children's capacity to think for themselves? (Grimmitt, 1973, p. 16). Grimmitt wanted to establish a strong educational and philosophical base to religious education:

> This replacement of the Bible-centred approach by the Child-centred approach marked an important advance in re-appraising religious teaching in schools. There was, however, very little attention given to working out an educationally acceptable philosophy to underlie this new 'developmental' approach to religious education. In other words, in began with the *content* rather than the *aims* (Grimmitt, 1973, p. 20).

Grimmitt proposed that a clear distinction be made between religious education and faith development in both confessional and non-confessional school settings. Both school settings perceived that the aim of the teaching of religion was leading towards commitment to the Christian faith, because "the task of school in relation to religious teaching is identical with that of the Church" (Grimmitt, 1973, p. 21). The differentiation between the role of the school and of the Church meant that an educational basis of religious education was required.

Grimmitt came to a number of conclusions. The first was that a child's thinking is developmental and therefore religious education also needs to be developmental. Secondly, a child's own experiences is the starting point for learning, so in religious education this also has to be the starting point. Thirdly, religious education needs to take into account the stages of the child's cognitive development. Finally he argued that there is a need to link the child's experiences with religious concepts.

The work of Goldman and Grimmitt sits within a broader literature that examines the developmental and psychological aspects of religious education. An examination of that literature is not within the scope or purposes of this thesis, yet some attention needs to be given to these major developments. Goldman and Grimmitt worked in the UK. Other developmental theorists from different parts of the world have also contributed to the development of a theory of religious education. The method was

supported by the humanistic psychologists of the mid-twentieth century (Frankl 1963; Maslow 1968; Erikson 1968). Furthermore, Kohlberg (1976) and Fowler (1982), in particular, have explored the psychological development of human beings and have transferred their understandings to moral and faith areas of an individual's life. Fowler (1981) commenced from the premise that faith is a universal phenomenon and not confined to particular religious expressions of faith. He researched the role of the family and its place in society and proposed that faith is present in the context of people's lives. Drawing on developmental psychology, he concluded that if people move through stages in their psychological development then in the area of faith development they do they same. What influences religious education is an awareness of the wholeness of people's lives and the developmental stages and phases they move through and how this would impact upon the religious education curriculum and teaching methods at different year levels within Catholic secondary schools.

Australian researchers

An Australian adaptation of the phenomenological approach is found in the work of Moore and Habel (1982), who refined the work of Smart and developed what they called a *typological approach*. They embarked on a classification and study of types of phenomena in religion as a way of learning about their interrelationships and traditions. Their classification of religious phenomena draws on Smart. They list these classifications as follows: beliefs, texts, stories, ethics, ritual, symbols, social structure, and experience.

Lovat, another Australian researcher and educator, commenced with an educational and theological critique of religious education. His work explores the relationship between religion and education with the conviction that:

> There is nothing more important to a good RE curriculum than to have its developments linked to those of the wider educational world (Lovat, 1995, p. 40).

There is recognition that in religious education there are two theoretical conversations occurring, one in confessional circles and the other in non-confessional (state school) circles. He calls for a blending of the conversations:

> Much of this development has been in the confessional or Church-based arena and much of it in the State education arena.

Interestingly, there has been relatively little interaction between the two arenas, at least until recently (Lovat, 1995, p. 85).

He critiques the praxis approach of Groome and the typological approach of Habel and Moore, and integrates the best of that into his *critical model*, which is a composite model. He states:

> Thomas Groome has done RE no end of service by developing a model which takes advantage of these radical breakthroughs in education. In fact, his work is one of the most comprehensive welding of RE to contemporary educational thinking ever made in the English-speaking world (Lovat, 1995, p. 36).

He blends the typological and praxis models together. There are six stages in the flexible model:

1.   *Select* phenomenon from the Home Tradition

2.   *Identify* 'type' to which this belongs

3.   *Explore* examples of 'type' from beyond the tradition

4.   *Compare* common characteristics of type with selected phenomenon

5.   *Interpret* for place and proper context

6.   *Appraise* critically.

The work of Lovat has been praised for its contribution to the theoretical development of religious education:

> Lovat's critical model has the potential to be a major contribution to religious education: it is underpinned by critical theory and sound educational and curriculum principles that promote interdisciplinary dialogue and cross-curriculum planning, and it respects contemporary developments in theology (Welbourne, 1995, p. 128).

The phenomenological approach to religious education has been used within the religious education curriculum in Catholic schools in a number of significant ways. Firstly, as part of the religious education curriculum, students undertake religious education units in comparative religions, using the categories of analysis of religions that were suggested by Smart and Moore and Habel. At senior secondary level, students can opt to undertake units 1-4 of *Religion and Society* as part of the required Victorian Certificate of Education. *Religion and Society* explores the phenomenon of religious education in society and is open to all students in all schools, regardless of any

association with a particular tradition. Teachers of religious education who are involved in the teaching of these units at senior secondary school level draw upon this phenomenological paradigm in the teaching of religious education. The study design, *Religion and Society,* draws on the eight aspects of religion proposed by Habel and Moore and also has links with Grimmitt's theoretic position (Engebretson, 1995).

3.6 A theory of religious education from an education in religion perspective

Religious education as catechesis has been the most commonly held theory of religious education in Catholic schools in this country. This is understandable given the traditionally strong links between the Catholic Church and Catholic schools. Catholic schools were, and still are to a great extent, described as communities of faith that have close links with the faith life of the Church, and this resulted in the understanding of religious education from a catechetical perspective.

In this section of the chapter a different theory will be examined: religious education from an educational perspective, or as it was called by Rossiter (1981), education in religion. This emphasis does not deny the possibility or desirability of the faith-forming and catechetical dimensions of religious education. Religious education and catechesis are "still relevant and necessary in curriculum construction" (Rummery, 2001, p. 15). In this educational approach, however, the emphasis is on the educational components of religious education, particularly in the formal religious education classrooms.

Rummery and an educational approach to religious education

R. M. Rummery, an Australian De La Salle Brother, was the first Australian to present a systematic view of the educational dimensions of religious education post Vatican II. He studied the county schools in England in the early 1970s and was influenced by the work of Smart (Rummery 2001). Upon his return to Australia he lectured to teachers in Sydney at the Catholic College. His doctoral research was published in the seminal work, *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society* (1975). This work is

…seen as the beginning of a systematic attempt to apply educational principles to religious education in Catholic schools (Ryan, 1997, p. 85).

One of Rummery's key questions was: Can we assume that classroom students are believers? If catechesis "supposes a common faith" (Rummery, 1975, p. 27) and is "an activity which takes place when believers, with fellow believers, deepen their personal faith by their common dialogue, activity, and worship as members of the Church" (Rummery, 1975, p. 172), then what are the implications for religious education within classrooms?

Rummery's core position is that much of the confusion arises from a failure to appreciate the distinctions between the concepts of catechesis and religious education (Rummery, 1975, p. vii). At the basis of this is a failure to recognise the importance of language in the formation of an understanding of concepts and ideas. This is also recognised by others (Westerhoff 1977). As highlighted in Chapter Two of this thesis, the normative documents of the Church have been responsible for much of this confusion by the inconsistent way in which they have used language about religious education and catechesis. Rummery proceeds with an exploration of the concepts of religious education and catechesis in order to establish what links there may be and concludes that:

> The foregoing analysis leaves us in no doubt that the concepts of religious education and catechesis are clearly separable (Rummery, 1975, p. 171).

On the other hand, Rummery argues for a justification that schools rightfully engage in matters of faith. Faith is one of the specific concerns of the Catholic school. Schools have an explicit parental mandate to assist in the faith development of the students who present themselves to a Catholic school. As the staff is predominantly Roman Catholic and most students are baptised Catholic, it behoves the Catholic school to assert the important faith dimension of religious education.

Moran

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the work of Moran has been voluminous and important, but not without controversy. Unfortunately, most of his influence in Australia has been restricted to post-graduate students at tertiary level

(Malone 1990). His latter work has many connections with that of Rummery, emphasising that religious education is more than Church maintenance:

> Moran rejected previous concepts of the classroom teacher's role
> as deliverer of the Christian message. Instead the subject matter
> should be discovered together by student and teacher engaged in
> a common search (Ryan, 1997, p. 47).

For Moran the emphasis in religious education classrooms was on the individual's life and not the institution and key doctrinal formulations. There are two prongs in the religious education process: beginning with life and rigorous formal learning (Moran 1966a, 1983). Moran brought to the debate about religious education language both an ecclesiastical (church) and educational (school) language (Welbourne, 1995, p. 117). He also raised objections to the excesses of the life-centred approach to religious education but did not dismiss that emphasis. Life-connected religious education was important, but it was not to be the content of the religious education curriculum (Moran 1989).

Moran argued for a distinction to be made between two processes within religious education:

> Religious education is composed of two sharply contrasting
> processes: (1) teaching people religion and (2) teaching people to
> be religious in a particular way (Moran, 1991, p. 249).

In the process of teaching people *religion* there is the aim of understanding religion. The aim of teaching people to be *religious* involves a commitment to and a practice of a particular religious belief. Moran emphasised that an understanding of religion may not necessarily entail a religious commitment. The proper place for religious commitment to be nourished and explored is the liturgical and communal life of the faith community.

For Moran, much of the confusion in the field of religious education results from the combination of the two words 'religious' and 'education' (1970), and he argued for a renewed conceptualisation of religious education:

> Religious education is a field that must be reborn from a meeting
> of good educational theory and sound theological study (Moran,
> 1970, p. 19).

Such a model of religious education maintains links with the past but also transforms it. The process of education itself calls into question the dominant or traditional understandings of religious education. In fact, "religious education of the young has very

little to do with instruction in belief" (Moran, 1983, p. 188) and more to do with what is innate in every child. Whatever activity "opens reason in relation to some greater intelligence or understanding is part of religious education" (Moran, 1983, p. 195).

Rossiter

Graham Rossiter, an Australian researcher and educator, has had an enormous impact on religious education in Australia and overseas. His prolific research, writing and extensive teaching within what is now Australian Catholic University has been significant in the formulation of a theory and practice of religious education that has been taken up by many. In Australia other researchers have also been important, in particular Ryan (1997) and Malone (1982, 1990), whose work has been used extensively throughout this thesis. More recently the work of Welbourne (1995), Engebretson (1995), De Souza (1999) and Rymarz (1997) has added to a body of research and conceptualisation about religious education that has stamped religious education as a discipline within its own right in Australia.

Rossiter's doctoral study in 1983 proposed two orientations within religious education: 'education in religion' and 'education in faith'. These two expressions were not exclusive of each other, and did not aim to replace 'religious education' as the basic term. These orientations describe different processes and aims within religious education:

> Education in faith highlights religious education viewed from the perspective of a community of faith while 'education in religion' highlights religious education viewed from an educational perspective (Rossiter, 1983, p. 129).

In some ways these are similar to the two aspects of religious education outlined in the work of Moran. Education in religion, as Malone argued was "a subject studied in its own right" (Malone, 1990, p. 6), whereas in education in faith there was an "emphasis on the ecclesial goal of sharing faith" (Malone, 1990, p. 6).

Rossiter examined religious education from an educational perspective, the purposes of education, and the aims of religious education, both affective and cognitive. Following Rummery's work, he provided a systematic critique of religious education as catechesis. He questioned the assumptions of faith that are integral to catechesis, asked how they could be applied to religious education within the classroom, and questioned

the language of religious education that is based upon the concept of the school as a community of faith.

Catechesis as a possibility within the Catholic school was neither excluded nor diminished, but Rossiter questioned whether the classroom religious education program was an appropriate context for catechesis. Like Rummery and Moran, he considered that there was a confusion of purposes when catechesis and religious education were seen as identical, and that much of this resulted when the theory of religious education was based on the normative theory of catechesis presented in Church documents. However, Rossiter points out that for most religion teachers, the terms catechesis and religious education are used interchangeably (Rossiter, 1983, p. 396).

Rossiter posits three reasons for a confusion of language about the nature and purpose of religious education: different expectations of particular interests groups; different language from different roots in normative theory; and the problematic of what faith purposes are appropriate for the classroom (Rossiter, 1983, p. 25). In the introduction to Chapter Three of this thesis, the three stands were illustrated. When Rossiter comments on one of those strands, the classroom, he maintains that significant adaptations and qualifications need to be made if the broad aims of catechesis are to find a place within an awareness of the scope of what can and should be done in the classroom. Rossiter calls for a theory of religious education that more correctly reflects what could happen within the classroom context.

> The problem being addressed is not to do with the theory of catechesis; rather, the problem is that the school context, and classroom religion periods in particular, are not always appropriate places for catechesis (Rossiter, 1983, p. 403).

3.7 Conclusion

The analysis of three broad theoretical perspectives of religious education has revealed interwoven emphases. On the one hand, the perspectives can be distinguished by their major emphases: faith, education or phenomenology. On the other hand, they have much in common. Religious education used in an all-encompassing way can incorporate all three perspectives. Nevertheless, there are important issues that have been identified in this section, which are in fact similar to the issues that emerged from the analysis of the documents in Chapter One.

Crucial in the development of a theory of religious education is the context. What is being argued for is a theory of religious education as it applies to educational, specifically school contexts. The dominant approach in Australian Catholic secondary schools for the past 100 years has been the various forms of the faith-forming approaches to religious education. Such approaches were valid when it could be rightly assumed that all the students in Catholic secondary schools were members of the Catholic Church and they and their parents wanted that type of religious education. Since the 1970s this has been called into question and an emphasis has developed that religious education should be approached from an educational emphasis rather than the faith emphasis. The implications of this change for religious education theory and the role of the REC in Catholic schools is important to this thesis and will be further discussed in the empirical component of this thesis.

Chapter Four

A historical perspective on the role of RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters Two and Three of this thesis the role of RECs was set within the context of Church primary source documents on religious education and within theoretical perspectives on religious education. The aim of those chapters was to provide a context for understanding the nature and purpose of religious education, as integral to the role of the RECs in the coordination of religious education within Catholic secondary schools, and to illustrate the various theoretical perspectives that influence them. The primary attention of the empirical study reported later in this thesis is the way in which RECs perceive their role in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. This necessitates a detailed examination of key historical developments that have had an impact in that diocese. A range of data from the CEOM is analysed in order to trace key developments in the role of the REC.

4.2 Articulation of the role of the REC in the Melbourne *Guidelines for Religious Education*

The CEOM has a different relationship with its schools from other CEOs, particularly those of New South Wales and Queensland. The reasons for this are a result of historical events and philosophical decisions. Within the Archdiocese of Melbourne there was historically a very high proportion of secondary schools owned and operated by religious orders. These orders operated under the authority of the Archbishop but were virtually independent in all other respects. They employed their own staff, had their own industrial salary scales and set their own policies in relation to schools (Malone 1982). In addition to the historical realities, philosophically the CEOM, particularly under Fr T. M. Doyle, Director of CEOM 1973-2002, developed as a service organisation whose primary task was the support of Catholic schools rather than direct management. Matters such as staffing, conditions of employment and review for middle managers (Deputy Principals, Curriculum Coordinators, RECS), which in some dioceses

are influenced and determined centrally, are left to local school policy in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese are given complete independence to make whatever provision they choose in relation to RECs. In other dioceses (Brisbane, Sydney) there are policies in regard to review and terms of management that each school has to follow.

The CEOM has not produced a policy statement on the role of the REC but rather has encouraged schools to develop approaches and arrangements at the local school level. It has produced policies in a range of other areas but not in religious education. Nevertheless, the various editions of the *Guidelines* provide insights into how the CEOM has perceived the role in the period of this thesis. The *Guidelines,* as the only official religious education material, contain a small number of significant statements on the role of the RECs.

1975 *Guidelines for Religious Education*

The 1975 *Guidelines* contained a covering letter from the Archbishop in which RECs were mentioned for the first time:

> With regard to Religious Education Co-ordinators – it is encouraging to know that so many of our schools have appointed a teacher to this role. In the present situation where more attention is being paid to the particular circumstances in which the education in faith in each school is being conducted, the need for a Co-ordinator is most obvious. I would like to see a Religious Education Co-ordinator appointed to and fulfilling the role in every school and college in the Archdiocese (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1975, p. 2).

This quotation highlights the early stage of development of the role of RECs because all schools had not yet taken up the role. No additional information is given about the nature and purpose of this new role. However, in referring to teachers of religious education in schools, the *Guidelines* use phrases such as "the faithful are to receive the faith" and "in the communication of faith we can never say we have done enough" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1975, p. 2) which clearly indicate that a catechetical theory of religious education was the assumed theory. Accordingly, the REC's role was essentially understood as contributing to the development of the faith of students in Catholic schools.

In 1977 revised *Guidelines* were produced. They were published in two parts, an overview and a detailed curriculum. The "Overview" presents both a pastoral and a curriculum overview and cites Church documents (EN, REF, WPJAL) as the basis for their theoretical understanding of religious education. The pastoral overview sets out the role of the school within the pastoral mission of the Church and maintains the catechetical emphasis:

> These guidelines are offered as a help to Catechesis. They are offered in the service of the Church's contribution to a person's growth in faith (Catholic Education Office, 1977, p. 6).

The curriculum overview, on the other hand, points to the key educational task of the *Guidelines*, which is:

> …to give an overview to help coordinators and staff plan their work systematically and evaluate their courses (Catholic Education Office, 1977, p. 11).

The "Overview" also articulates a view of religious education that tries to balance catechetical and educational theories and states that there needs to be a distinction between "religious education as a subject" and "religion as a way of life" (Catholic Education Office, 1977, p. 12). As was discussed in both Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, this distinction was not always clear in the documentary sources or in the way in which teachers perceived religious education.

Two further additions to the role of the RECs were made in the 1977 edition of the *Guidelines*. The first addition, described the educational component of the role in greater detail to include three elements, namely, "the systematic co-ordination, planning and evaluation of the Religious Education of Secondary Students" (Catholic Education Office, 1977, p. 16). Furthermore, they reinforced that these materials were 'guidelines' and it was the role of the RECs and the religious education teachers at the local school level to:

> …decide whether the suggested emphases and levels of experience, knowledge and skills are appropriate to the reality of their school or whether some topics should be allocated to other levels (Catholic Education Office, 1977, p. 11).

Implied in the decision to have schools develop their own religious education curriculum is that schools, and in particular RECs with their religious education teachers, possess the necessary skills in curriculum development to achieve what is expected of them in relation to the religious education curriculum. In fact, material referred to in earlier sections of this thesis indicates that this assumption about the level of skills in this highly skilled area of curriculum development is misplaced.

1984 *Guidelines for Religious Education*

In 1984 another revised set of *Guidelines* was published. In the previous seven years there had been considerable development in the role of the REC to a point where all schools had an REC, local networks were emerging, regular RECs' conferences were held, and there were professional development activities available through the CEOM. Also in the period 1977-1984 three important Church documents relating to religious education (CT, CS, LCS) were promulgated by the Church. As mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, these represented divergent theoretical positions in relation to religious education. In the introductory section of the 1984 *Guidelines*, under the section "What is Religious Education?", quotations from the REF, GDC, CT and CS are extensive. The *Guidelines* state that "the basic sources for the content of the Guidelines are the GDC, REF and CT" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984, p. 13).

The 1984 *Guidelines* restate some of the educational dimensions of the role of REC as "planning, programming, co-ordination and evaluation of the Religious Education" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984, p. 4). The *Guidelines* comment for the first time on the explicit aspect of the role:

> Religious Education teachers and co-ordinators exercise a very significant ministry in the Church as they reach out to those who will be touched by their work (Catholic Education Office, 1984, p. 4).

The language of ministry has been taken from the Church documents referred to in Chapter Two of this thesis, and is here transferred to the RECs, suggesting a strong ecclesial and catechetical character in the role. In addition, RECs are encouraged to "deepen their own lives of faith" and to invite the "young people to grow in the life of the Church" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984, p. 4).

Another influence at work in the *Guidelines* is reflected in a statement that distinguishes between the responsibility of the Principal and that of the REC. Policies and guidelines concerning RECs state that the Principal is ultimately responsible for religious education:

> The Principal is ultimately responsible for religious education in the school. A religious education co-ordinator, appointed by the Principal, is given special responsibility for the RE program. This co-ordinator is accountable to the principal and should work with staff, assess their catechetical needs and those of the students, plan strategies and prepare programs in consultation with staff, communicate with school, parish, and diocesan groups, and establish evaluation, assessment and reporting procedures for the religious education program (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984, p. 11).

This statement articulates that the REC is delegated specific tasks in relation to the role but that the ultimate responsibility for religious education remains with the Principal.

1984 Policy Statement: Religious Education at Senior Secondary Level

In response to the proposed introduction of religious studies units for study by senior students in all secondary schools by the Victorian Department of Education, the CEOM developed a specific religious education policy for its schools. The CEOM wanted to ensure that a comprehensive understanding of religious education was included in the policy and that Catholic schools undertaking the benefits of these studies would do so within a specific understanding of religious education that was appropriate for them. It stated that the religious education program must take into account the opportunities and constraints of the adolescent stage of development and the structures of compulsory and post-compulsory schooling (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984b, p. 2). Furthermore, the religious education programs "are designed to educate the whole person and so many experiences within the life of the Catholic school contribute to a student's religious education" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1984b, p. 2).

This policy proposed that the following areas needed to be included in the total religious education program for students:

- Opportunities for social action.
- School structures and organisation.
- Pastoral care.

- Aspects of the formal classroom program of other units of study which might relate to religious education (education for peace, values/moral development, personal development, science and bio-ethics, thematic studies in Humanities or English).
- Activities outside the formal classroom program that relate directly to religious education (liturgical experiences, voluntary interests groups, retreats).
- Formal classroom program for religious education, including objectives, content, methods, assessment and evaluation which could include use of the state-based religious studies units.

The policy was presented diagrammatically and became known in secondary schools as the 'circle diagram' on the nature of religious education. It is reproduced in Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1 Circle diagram of the religious education program in Catholic secondary schools 1984
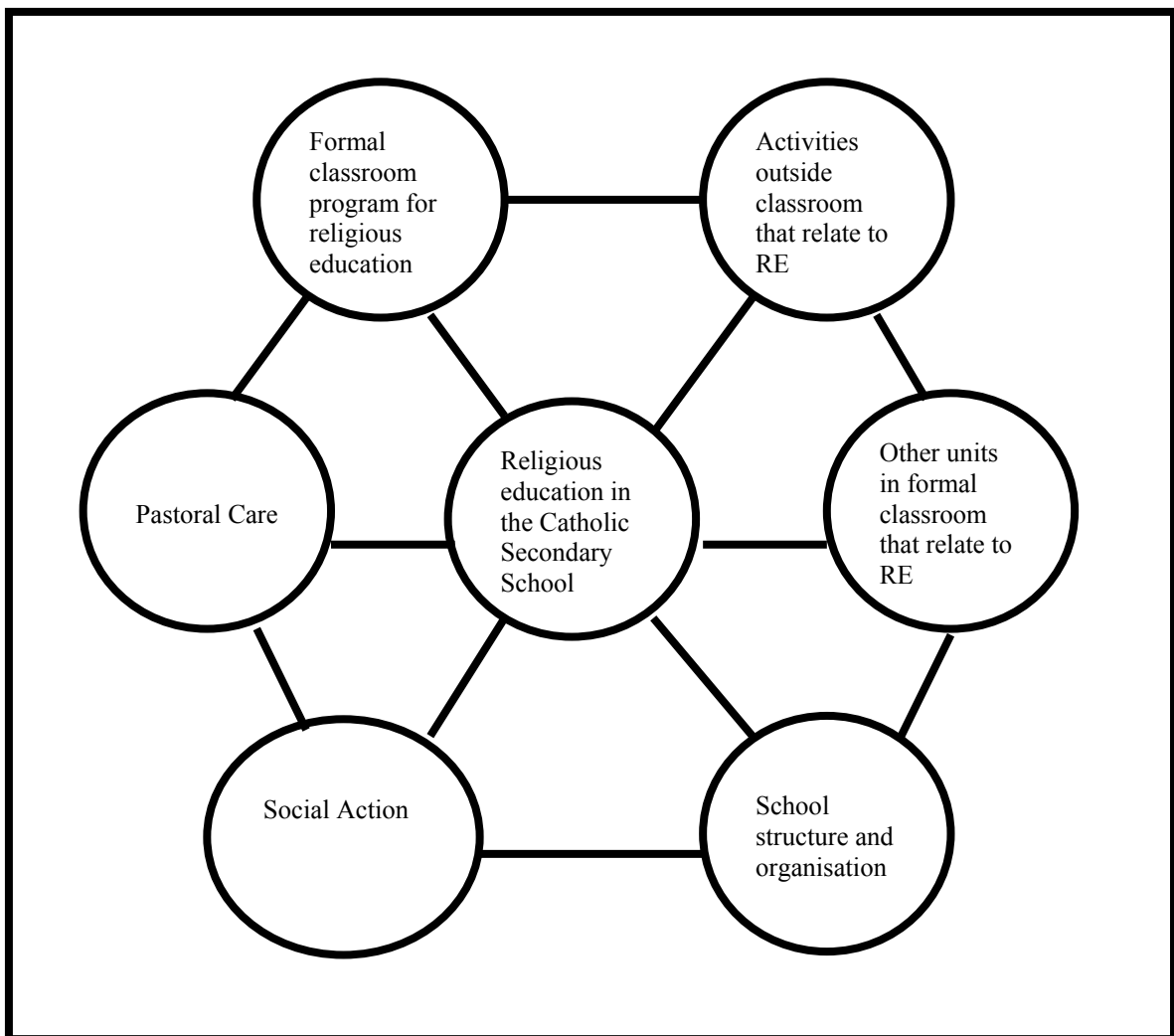
The 'circle diagram' shows both the complexity and diversity of the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools. Religious education is not something confined to the religious education classroom. The diagram highlights that there is a religious dimension to all educational endeavours that operate within other subject areas as well as pastoral care policies, social justice activities and the day-to-day administration of the school.

The implications for the RECs are considerable. In the mid to late 1980s it was common for Catholic secondary schools to have a person designated as the Pastoral Care Coordinator. In many ways this was an adjunct to the role of the REC since this person was responsible for pastoral care programs in the school, which as shown (Figure 4.1) were a key aspect of the religious dimension of the school. In addition, the diagram indicates the breadth of the tasks that any one person in the role of REC would have in coordinating the entire religious education program in a school. During this period many schools broke the role of REC into smaller manageable parts with separate individuals taking responsibility for areas such as pastoral care, liturgy and social action in an attempt to reduce the workload on one person.

1995 *Guidelines for Religious Education*

The most recent *Guidelines*, 1995, have the most expansive and detailed articulation of the role of the REC (Appendix 1). This edition of the *Guidelines* keeps the 1984 concept of the REC as a ministry, and divides the work of the role into "formation, curriculum and administration" (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 21-22). 'Formation' is a peculiarly religious term used in relation to formation of novices in religious life, and here is used as a descriptor of the faith dimensions of the role of the REC. Under the curriculum and administration headings there is a lengthy list of duties to be performed. The statements about the role are generic and the detail needs to be formulated in the school context:

> It is, therefore, essential that schools and parishes clearly define the role of the religious education coordinator in the light of their needs, expectations and profile, and within the school provide sufficient release time so that a clear vision of the Catholic school as an integral part of the Church's mission is demonstrated (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1995, p. 21).

The theoretical bases for the role are not presented. It remains a checklist of duties rather than an exposition of the nature of the role of the REC in schools.

Summary

These four editions of the *Guidelines* trace the development of the role of the REC from its infancy in the early 1970s until the present time. Over that period the blending of the catechetical and educational aspects in the role is evident. However, the ecclesial language of ministry, formation and growth in faith dominates the language of the theoretical framework of the role. A consistent pattern has been the approach of the CEOM to delegate to schools at the local level all decisions about the role of the REC. In particular, schools are to determine the precise religious education curriculum, and this assumes and necessitates that individual RECs have the prerequisite skills and training to do this and that religious education teachers can deliver such a curriculum. However, the CEOM does not give any indication of the skills, experience or qualifications needed by RECs. As will be shown later in this chapter, other CEOs mandate the level of qualifications as well as the place the REC has in the administrative structure in schools. RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne have no central document that details conditions and roles of the RECs in their schools, so for each REC conditions must be negotiated at each school.

4.3 Critical meetings of RECs from 1973-1999

Over the period of time being investigated in this chapter, groups of RECs have gathered on numerous occasions at professional development days, conferences and local network meetings. A number of these have particular significance as they have occurred at critical moments in the development of the role of the REC.

1973 RECs and Principals Conference on the role of the REC

An examination of the archives of the CEOM indicated that the first gathering of RECs and Principals for the specific purpose of discussing the role of the REC was in 1973. Br K. Treston, an Australian who had completed doctoral studies in religious education overseas, was the presenter. At that meeting he gave the participants an outline of the role of the REC (Appendix 2). The meeting was an attempt, at this very early point in the history of the role of RECs, to develop a theoretical model of religious

education coordination. The elements of the job description as pointed out by Treston involve these dimensions:

Figure 4.2 Treston's dimensions of the role of the REC
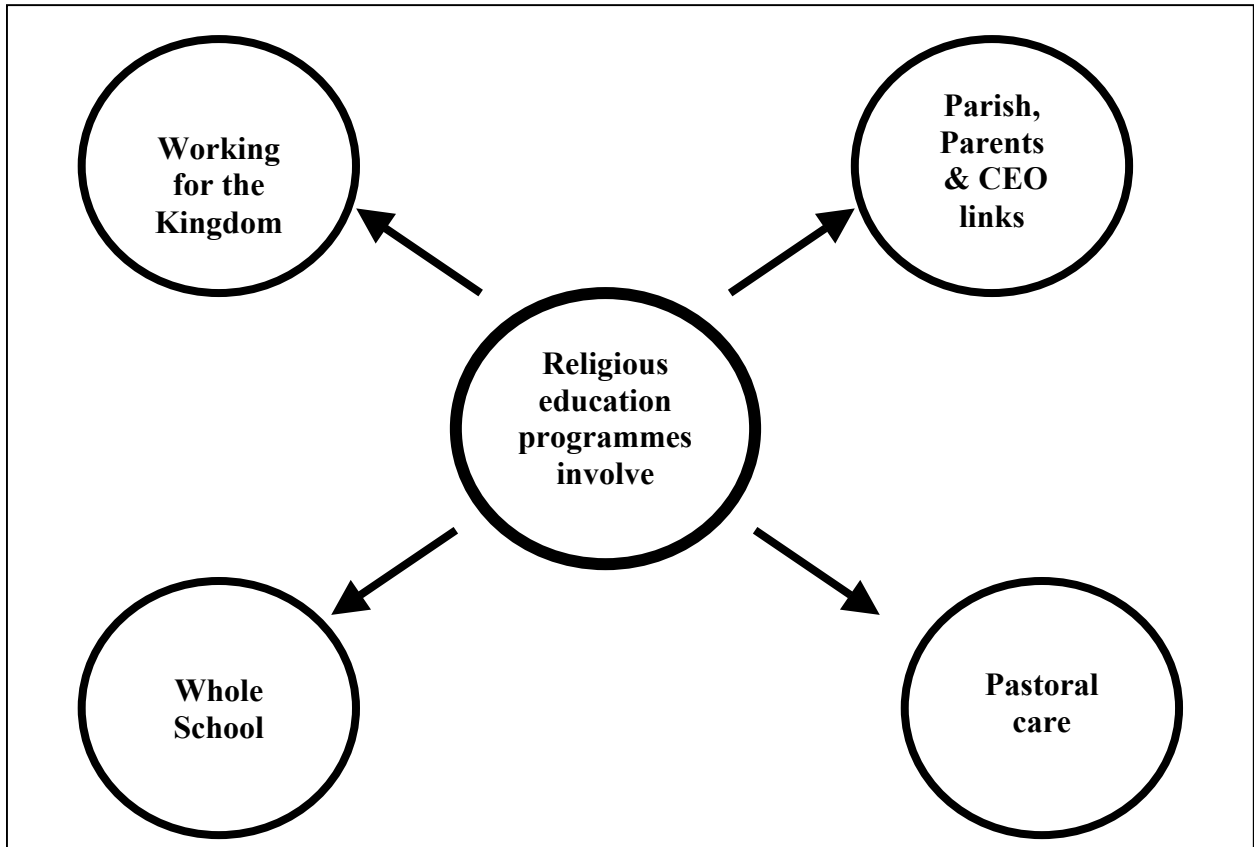
This model points to the areas of work of the RECs (e.g., whole school, parish). It does not elaborate on a theory of religious education or on suggestions about the prerequisite skills required by the RECs, nor on the support needed for RECs in the schools. It is limited to the area of the work of the REC without grounding it within a philosophy or pedagogy of the role.

1975 Role statement on RECs by RECs at their annual conference

Two years later, in 1975, RECs gathered for a three-day RECs conference to hear from Brother Marcellin Flynn about the findings of his doctoral research into the nature of Catholic schools. His work had recently been published in *Some Catholic Schools in Action* (1975) and it examined the impact of Catholic schools on the faith

of students and the broad socialisation dimensions of religious education. As a consequence of what he had presented, and reflecting upon their own work, the RECs wrote a seven-point statement of a role for RECs (Appendix 3). It is significant that at this early stage of the development of the role, that RECS believed it was necessary to prepare a statement that represented their views in the absence of any direction from the CEOM. A summary of the key points of their statements is given in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Summary of document from 1975 RECs conference

RE effective if image is congruent with message

RECs need to be concerned about climate and morale of school

Teachers need to be committed to journey of faith

REC relies upon support from Principal and staff

RECs role extends beyond the dimensions of school

Key religious education personnel to assist RECs at year levels

Many religious education teachers have little training in the field

Release time needed for religious education teachers to attend in-service programs

Many of the goals of religious education are faith goals

This is a more developed understanding of the role of the REC than in Treston (1973). It points to the critical issues of support for the REC, the necessity of having a significant time allowance to carry out the duties of the role, the importance of the training and qualifications of the religious education teacher and the centrality of faith within an understanding of religious education, an emphasis that consistently came through curriculum documents.

1980 Seminar on the role of the RECs

In 1980 Br Mark O'Loughlin, working as an educational consultant at the CEOM, presented a range of materials to the RECs at a two-day seminar. He distributed material in which he proposed a series of important questions that he put to the RECs (Appendices 4 and 5). This was the first documented occasion when RECs were called together specifically to explore the educational dimensions of the

religious education curriculum in a specific and focused way. He made a deliberate attempt to situate religious education within the disciplines of religious education, and education using the curriculum constructs of concepts, topics, learning objectives and learning approaches. What is noteworthy about O'Loughlin's questions, which shape the conceptualisation of the role is that he separates the administrative functions and statement of duties (Appendix 5) from the curriculum issues (Appendix 4). Items 1-7 and 9-12 in the curriculum area relate specifically to the construction and implementation of a religious education curriculum in accordance with the *Guidelines*.

Intermingled with these primarily educational concerns are the faith concerns. In these faith-framed questions there are indications of the material found in Church documents and material from developmental psychologists such as Kohlberg (1987) and Fowler (1981), as well as material by the American Christian educator Westerhoff (1976, 1977). Other questions are theological – for example, question 8 asks, "Is the person of Jesus of Nazareth at the heart of religious education?" – while others relate to stages of faith and readiness. Some of O'Loughlin's questions (16-18 in Appendix 4) presume that faith sharing and catechesis are possible in the religious education curriculum, although whether this is in the context of the religious education classroom or some other context in the school is not stipulated. Significant in this presentation is the obvious convergence of religious education and education, and an attempt to develop a theory of religious education that is not only firmly rooted in the catechetical dimensions of the Church, but also based on critical educational questions about those dimensions.

<u>1995 Joint meeting of the CEOM and the PAVCSS on the role of the REC</u>

On September 14th 1995, a historical conference was called by the CEOM. It was important historically as it called together the PAVCSS (Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools) and RECs to discuss the issues that had emerged from data about the role of RECs collected by the CEOM since 1988. The advertisement for the meeting stated:

> This conference aims to focus on issues related to the
> collaboration between the Principal and Religious Education
> Co-ordinator in exercising responsibility for religious

education in the Catholic secondary school (CEO archive material)

There were three parts to the conference. Initially there was a presentation of data that had emerged from the annual surveys of RECs (1988-1995). This was followed by a presentation from a Principal and an REC, and then by group discussions about the role of REC, chaired by members of the religious education staff of the CEOM. Each group presented a summary of their discussions (an example is provided in Appendix 6). The summaries do not indicate the relative importance of each of the items listed, but when viewed as a whole they point to the pervading negative mood as a consequence of the substantive difficulties that the RECs were experiencing in the role. The participants questioned whether the status of religious education and the REC in schools was recognised, arguing that there was an ambivalent attitude to religious education in schools from teachers.

The group reports questioned the training of religious education teachers and why they were appointed to teach religious education without the necessary skills. In addition, the reports complained that religious education within the daily school timetable received last place, implying that it was not significant. Furthermore, it was claimed that the role of the REC is more difficult than that of other department heads of curriculum and requires more support and assistance from the school. Certainly, the analysis of the empirical component of this research (Chapters Seven to Nine) supports the statements that were made at this conference.

A number of critical issues emerged from this conference. On one level, given that the CEOM saw its relationship with Catholic secondary schools as advisory and supportive, it was only able to initiate and facilitate a vital meeting of RECs and Principals and intended that the matters raised be followed through at the local school level. The RECs had been seeking a way of conceptualising the role since the early 1970s. The CEOM had steadfastly refused to be the author of such a conceptualisation. Furthermore, the very poor attendance at the meeting (less than 50% of the schools were represented) indicated that in the minds of many there was little importance attached to the conference and by implication to the role of the REC. In addition, the action – or more precisely, the lack of action – by the PAVCSS to concretely address these issues in any collective and collaborative manner as a consequence of the meeting was disappointing, and proved that the issue of religious

education coordination in Catholic secondary schools was not uppermost in the mind of the Principals' Association or that there was not sufficient will to implement changes.

Three meetings of religious education specialists on the role of the REC 1998-1999

During the twenty-year reign of Archbishop Little in the Archdiocese of Melbourne religious education in Catholic and State schools was under the direction of Fr T. M. Doyle in his capacity as Director of the CEOM. In effect, Fr Doyle was responsible for the day-to-day overseeing of religious education in Catholic schools. In 1996 Archbishop George Pell replaced Archbishop Frank Little. As a result of that appointment, changes occurred in the relationship between the Archdiocese and the CEOM initiated by Archbishop Pell. He appointed Rev. Monsignor Peter Elliot as Episcopal Vicar for Religious Education and took control of religious education away from the CEOM and transferred it to the Vicariate. Furthermore, Archbishop Pell established an inquiry into religious education in the diocese and published its results in *To Know, Worship and Love* (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2000). The major outcome was the determination to introduce new compulsory texts for religious education from Prep to Year 10 that in effect would replace the *Guidelines*. As part of the evolving dynamics, three meetings were held in the course of eighteen months organised by the Episcopal Vicar.

In May 1998, the Episcopal Vicar called a meeting with the title "First Religious Education Specialists Forum" which brought together members from schools, the CEOM and Australian Catholic University. The meeting raised issues about the new texts, teacher formation, RECs and the role of Principals in Catholic schools. Among the varied discussion points that emerged it was clear, just as the 1995 meeting with the Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS) had been clear, that the role of the REC was very challenging and difficult. A letter to participants sent out after the meeting contained minutes (Appendix 7) in which it was recorded that in some cases "religious education is not given the place it should have". Further issues regarding the appointment of RECs, time release for the role, and their place on the leadership teams of schools were also raised. The Episcopal Vicar, who had been in Rome for the previous decade, expressed surprise and dismay that the role of the REC appeared to be in such a

perilous state. Consequently, he called for a 2nd Specialist forum to be devoted entirely to the role of the REC. This was organised for November of the same year.

At this November forum, there were presentations from a parish priest, a Principal and RECs from both primary and secondary schools. Similar issues were raised as in the first forum, this time in more depth. In the covering letter from the Episcopal Vicar that was sent to participants in the second forum (Appendix 8), the following statement was made:

> The findings of this report will be presented to the joint working committee of this Vicariate and the Catholic Education Office, so that concrete proposals for developing the role and status of the REC can be prepared (Episcopal Vicar, invitational letter 1998).

The letter concludes by stating:

> The role and status of the Religious Education Coordinator is one of the major areas calling for renewal in our mission of teaching the living Faith of the Church (Episcopal Vicar, invitational letter 1998).

The joint working committee referred to in the invitational letter organised a meeting in August 1999 entitled "Dialogue with Principal and RECs". Once again there were presentations from a range of RECs from both primary and secondary Catholic schools about the nature of their role.

These critical meetings of religious education specialists and RECs have not resulted in any gains for the role of the RECs in Catholic schools. On the contrary, they repeated the same lack of action that occurred in 1995 at the PAVCSS conference. The continual raising of awareness in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, the CEOM and the Vicariate of issues relating to RECs has not resulted in the establishing of a conceptualisation of the role, or impacted upon the working of the REC in Catholic schools. The gap between the desires of the RECs for directions and the incapacity or lack of desire of central authorities to respond to the issues has remained. None of these meetings resulted in a more direct or structured communication about the role of the REC.

The historical events referred to in this section have as a common theme the search for clarification of the role of the REC in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. From the very first official conference of RECs (1973) until those in 1999 with the Episcopal Vicar, the searching for and exploration of the nature of the role has been a constant theme in the historical development of the RECs. The search for a conceptual framework within which to express the role of the REC throughout this thirty-year period has always tried to balance two demands: the expectation from the Church that the REC be a leader of catechesis and the often competing tensions of education in a pluralist context. These tensions, which have been the subject of many of the important gatherings of the RECs, reflect many of the same tensions that were expressed in the documents of the Church (Chapter Two) and in the work of the researchers and theorists in religious education (Chapter Three).

Throughout these events the CEOM and the Episcopal Vicar for Religious Education were inactive in responding to the needs of the RECs. As has been demonstrated, the RECs have over time expressed the need for central clarification and support for the role and, unfortunately, the only response has been in words not followed by action. The lack of centralised support results in the RECs relying upon the good will, judgement and support of the local Principal to determine how the role is structured. This has meant that the issues of the place of religious education, the position of the REC in school leadership structure, time release, qualifications and skills required for the role – issues which have been stressed as important for the RECs – are not being centrally supported.

4.4 CEOM surveys on RECs – background information

This section of the thesis examines quantitative data from the CEOM. The major source of data comes from annual surveys into the role of the RECs by the CEOM since 1988. The annual data has been transferred into longitudinal data by the researcher, along with additions and amendments. In addition to the surveys, there are general records commencing in 1983 that add to data on RECs. Quantitative data contained in these materials provides information regarding RECs that can be traced over a twelve-year period and indicates substantial trends and changes. While not in

the same format, a considerable portion of this information has been published previously by this researcher in preliminary findings as part of the research (Fleming 2001a, 2001b).

During 1987 a decision was made by the CEOM that commencing in the following year there would be an annual survey of RECs (both primary and secondary). In a circular to school Principals on January 28th, 1988 the Director of Catholic Education outlined the reason for the survey, which was designed to enable the CEOM to develop a profile of RECs. In particular it stated:

> The form has been designed to obtain information about the release time given to these staff members, and as well about their experience and qualifications both in general teaching and in Religious Education (CEOM, Archives).

Furthermore, the information was to help the CEOM in the planning of in-services for RECs based upon their needs.

The reasons for the decision to commence the survey are unclear. However, the CEOM archives contain information that aspects of the RECs role were the topic of some specific internal discussion at the end of 1987. In November 1987, a member of the Secondary Religious Education Team at the Melbourne Catholic Education Office wrote an internal discussion paper dealing with RECs. The central issue of length of service as an REC led to a list of ten questions (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 CEOM questions on length of service of RECs

1. Is it desirable for many schools to have a high turnover of Religious Education Coordinators?
2. Do many Religious Education Coordinators find the job too onerous and hence leave that position fairly quickly?
3. Do many Religious Education Coordinators go to other positions of leadership within the one school? In other schools?
4. What advantages, if any, do Religious Education Coordinators who remain for a relatively long term (three to six years) have?
5. What can schools do to promote stable leadership in Religious Education?
6. What preparation and in-service is necessary to be an REC in schools?
7. What term would be optimal for Religious Education Coordinators? Does this vary from school to school? Is it two years or less?
8. Is shared leadership desirable? Under what circumstance?
9. Does a change in REC imply new directions for RE within a school?
10. Are there adequate transition mechanisms when Religious Education Coordinators change in a school?

<u>Difficulties with the data</u>

The survey was developed to gain quantitative information on aspects of the RECs role. The result has been the accumulation of information on an annual basis that enables longitudinal trends to be analysed. While the annual data from these surveys was made available, some difficulties were encountered by the researcher when establishing and analysing trends across the period 1988-1999. Some of the difficulties were a result of the survey instrument itself, as there have been regular changes to what has been included in the survey, resulting in a lack of uniformity of data in some of the items surveyed.

It is important that these difficulties, while not major, are at least raised prior to the presentation of the data so that the conclusions reached take them into account. The survey format that was constructed in 1988 has seen changes over the years, including additions, omissions and modifications. This can be seen by comparing the 1988 and 1995 survey forms (Appendices 7 and 8). An example of the alterations to the survey forms is the section that relates to time release given to RECs. The majority of annual surveys collected time-release as hours per week, but for two years (1992-1993) the survey collected time release as terms of percentage of teaching load. Because of this variation it was not possible to accurately convert the figures to hours per week.

A second difficulty related to the presentation of data. Data can be represented in two ways: as a percentage of schools and as a percentage of RECs. The number of schools and number of RECs are not the same because a significant number of schools have more than one person in the role of REC. Figure 4.5 highlights the potential distortion and confusion.

Figure 4.5 Different ways of calculating data

Number of schools = 70	RECs on Admin = 50	% of RECs = 71
Number of RECs = 110	RECs on Admin = 50	% of RECs = 45

There appears to be a vast discrepancy between 45% of RECs on these teams as opposed to 71% of schools that have RECs on the teams. Yet the figures are

accurate. In this case the more relevant figure is 71% as each school has only one team.

There are also a number of smaller issues in relation to data analysis that need to be stated although their impact was minor. In some years a very small number of surveys were not received from schools, and this has had a slight impact when calculating the percentages across the total school population. A second factor is that the surveys were completed by schools and returned to the CEOM in February of each year. Consequently any changes that took place between March and December with a particular REC, such as replacement, or inclusion on leadership team, are not recorded in the figures.

The overall consequence of these variations and possibilities is that the data provides generalised trends rather than absolute precision. While every effort has been made, initially by the CEOM and then by this researcher, to present the data as accurately as possible, there may well be some small statistical error. In a small number of cases data has been rounded off or conversions made by the researcher. Also in a smaller number of cases calculations and estimates had to be made where the original data was not analysed in a uniform manner. Nevertheless, the meaning and usefulness of the data for this thesis are undiminished, and the data gives one form of insight into the role of the REC.

Some historical factors impacting upon the data

In the 1990s there were certain industrial decisions relating to Catholic secondary schools that need mentioning. During this decade the conditions of employment required schools to designate a percentage of time and money to positions of responsibility/leadership. The practice has been that these are generally tied to such positions as Heads of Key Learning Areas, Year Level Coordinators and positions in other areas that may be referred to as middle management positions. The REC position is in this category. One of the implications of this has been that people are appointed to these positions for a two-to-three year term and they then have to reapply. This gives staff in schools the option of not continuing in these middle management positions and returning to general teaching or assuming some other role within the school. Every two to three years there is an in-built cycle of change of

middle management responsibilities. This cyclical pattern can be observed in relation to the regular turnover of RECs.

4.5 Analysis of surveys from CEOM 1988-1999[5]

Numbers of RECs

From 1982 to 1999 there were 538 different people who acted in the role of REC. This includes those who were individually responsible for the role within a school and others who were in a variety of support positions such as Assistant REC or Coordinator of RE at a particular year level. Of these, 270 were female and 268 were male.

Members of religious orders accounted for 131 of the total number of RECs during this period, with seventy-three from female orders and fifty-eight from male orders. It is the case that there was a decline in the number of religious who work in these roles in schools. Figure 4.6 traces the steady decline from the early 1980s, when numbers were large, to the current situation where very few members of religious orders are in the role in schools.

Figure 4.6 Members of religious orders who have been RECs

Years	Female Religious	Male Religious
1982-1985	45	43
1986-1990	38	50
1991-1995	15	20
1996-1999	1	4

While figures for the 1970s are not available, it can nevertheless be said that from the early 1970s, when RECs first emerged in schools, through to the end of the 1980s, the presence of women and men religious played a significant part in the development of the role of RECs in Catholic secondary schools. Now responsibility for religious education has been transferred to lay teachers.

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[5] Data for 2000 and 2001 was not available

RECs and the career path to Principal

Some of the data relates to the possible career path of the RECs. The position of REC in a Catholic secondary school is a very important one and it could be assumed that it would provide appropriate grounding on the path to a Principal position. However, data for the period 1982-1999 indicates that there were only fifteen women who had been RECs who had also become Principals. On most occasions their work as an REC was prior to them becoming a Principal. Sometimes individual people jointly held the positions of REC and Principal in the absence of other options in the school. Of these fifteen women, some ten were members of religious orders. In regard to men, thirty-nine held both REC and Principal positions, and of these some twenty-two were members of religious orders.

It would seem clear that those chosen to fill the position of Principal have come from positions in the school other than REC, either from the broader curriculum area or from other areas of administration and leadership. As will be seen in the data presented later in the chapter, RECs are highly experienced teachers and possess the necessary academic qualifications to be made Principals. In addition, they are responsible for core work of the school in religious education. They possess professional skills and formal qualifications that are suited for the role of Principal in secondary schools. Yet they are not promoted in accordance with their skill and experience. Among the questions addressed by this thesis, this anomaly is of interest.

The number of RECs per school

Other data relates to the number of RECs employed in a school. This thesis includes only those schools that had a continuous existence from 1982-1999, thereby excluding closures, amalgamations and new schools. There is no uniform pattern to employment, but some schools chose the model of one person performing the role of REC while others divided the role between year levels, or allocated particular tasks, such as liturgy or pastoral care, to different individuals.

The average number of RECs per school in this period was close to nine, which across all schools means that on average schools had a new REC every two years. On the extremities of this average there were two schools in this time that had only three RECs. In contrast, one school had twenty. In this latter case, the school

chose the model of assistant RECs and year level religious education coordinators, resulting in what on the surface appears to be a massive turnover of RECs.

RECs and Faith Development Coordinators (FDCs)

Throughout this period the general title given to the person in the school with responsibility for religious education was REC. Since the late 1980s some schools, in order to divide the considerable workload, have chosen to have an FDC as well as an REC. The division is based upon what occurs within formal religious education classes and what occurs outside the formal classroom. The role of REC is a complex one and involves a multitude of tasks as seen in sample school role descriptions (Appendices 11-13). The REC is the one responsible for the classroom, and the FDC responsible for those things outside the classroom, such as liturgies, retreats, community service and social action groups. This appears to be a workable arrangement for an increasing number of schools.

However, Rossiter (1998) has raised concerns about the division. He argues that the development of the faith of students within the Catholic faith tradition has rightfully been a "fundamental aim of Catholic school religious education" (Rossiter, 1998, p. 20). He also points out that the role of the RECs in carrying out their responsibilities has been "overloaded with responsibilities" (Rossiter, 1998, p. 22). Dividing the workload and the responsibilities is more than justified. But, Rossiter argues, "the practice in some schools where the division is into the roles of the *religion coordinator* and *faith development coordinator* creates problems for the expectations of religious education" (Rossiter, 1998, p. 22). The usage of such terms creates a "false dichotomy between the cognitive and the personal aspects of spiritual development" (Rossiter, 1998, p. 23). Also, Rossiter argues that the titles suggest two different processes and a dualistic idea of religious faith. To argue that spiritual and faith development of students occurs only outside the classroom goes against the traditional and long-held view of religious education in Catholic schools in Australia.

As an indicator of this trend to divide the role between REC and FDC, the title of the survey from 1988 to 1994 was *Religious Education Co-ordination in Catholic Secondary Schools*. From 1995 it was called *Religious Education/Faith Development Co-ordination*. The trend from 1994 (Figure 4.7) shows a steady increase in the numbers of schools opting for this dual role.

Figure 4.7 The percentage of RECs who were also Faith Development Coordinators.
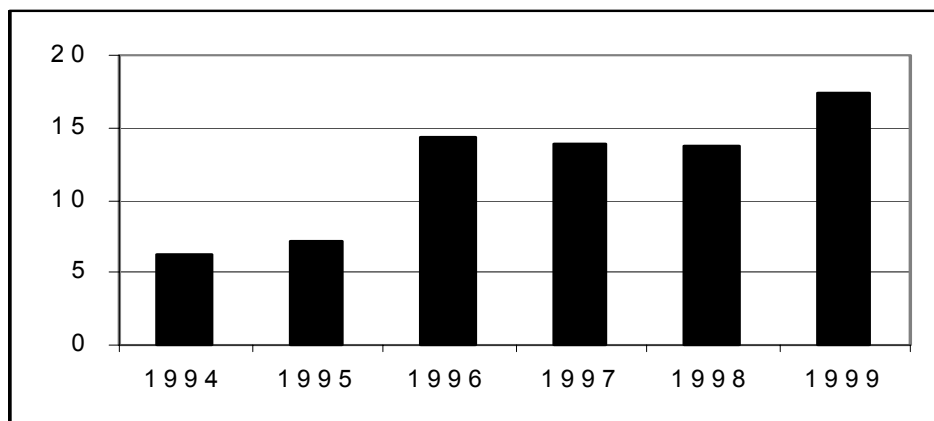
Qualifications of the RECs

In a number of dioceses a teacher cannot be employed in the position of an REC without either a Graduate Diploma or Masters degree in Religious Education or Theology (Archdiocese of Brisbane, Parramatta, Sydney). The Archdiocese of Melbourne does not require or demand formal qualifications and leaves employment decisions to the local school authority.

Figure 4.8 gives an overview of the percentage of RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in a given year that had qualifications in religious education and/or theology. The most common degrees undertaken by RECs are Diploma of Religious Education, the Graduate Diploma of Religious Education and the Masters degree in Religious Education. In theology they are the Diploma of Theology, the Bachelor of Theology and the Masters of Theology.

There is no data for 1995. The survey for that year asked people to indicate if they were undertaking study, but did not ask them to indicate if they had already completed a degree.

Figure 4.8 The percentage of RECs who have completed degrees in religious education and/or theology
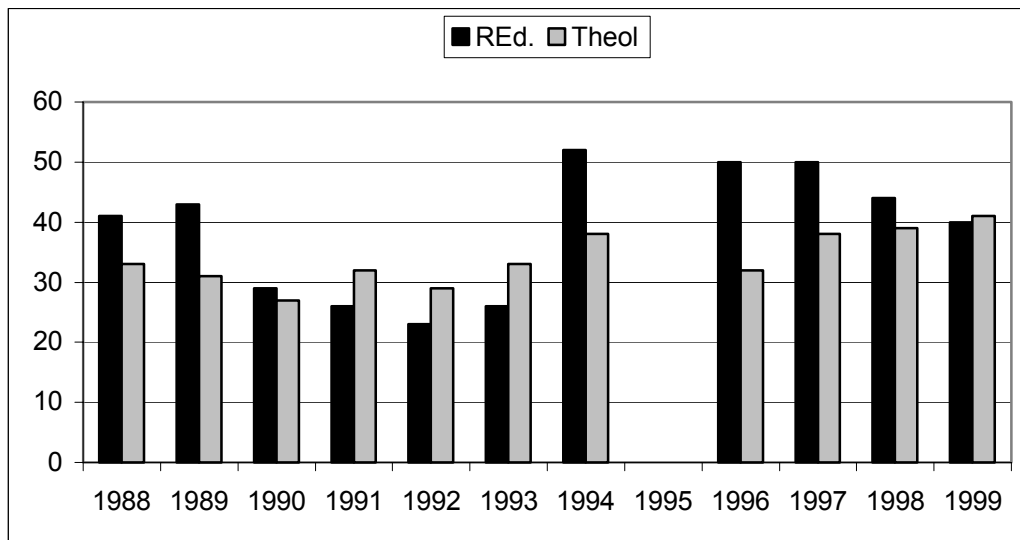
The overall data indicates that slightly more were studying religious education than theology. The data does not illustrate the percentage of RECs who had both a religious education and a theology degree. Furthermore, as the data indicates, from 1994 there was a significant increase in the numbers of RECs who had additional qualifications.

Each year there were also RECs who were undertaking study while actually being in the role. Once again, the numbers since 1994 were steadily increasing.

Figure 4.9 The percentage of RECs undertaking study in religious education and theology
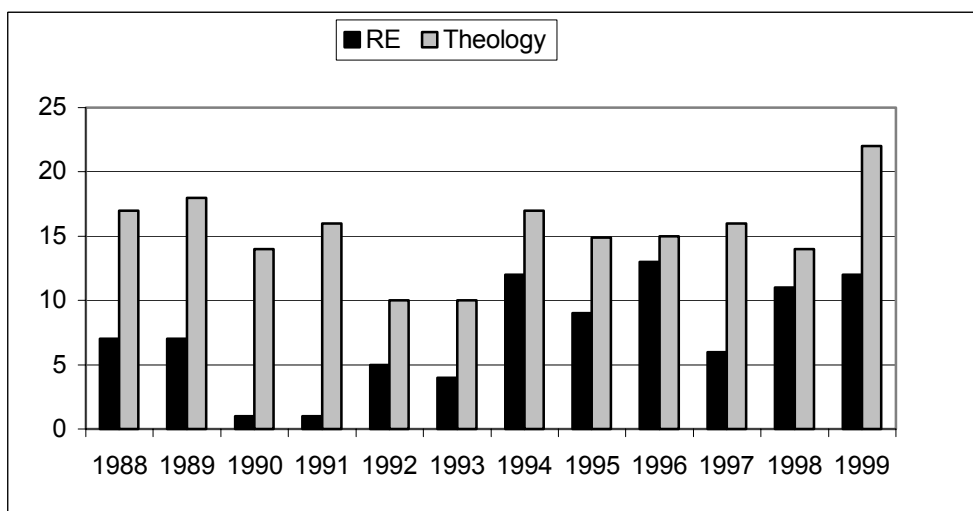
A number of factors relevant to this issue of post-graduate study need to be noted. The first is that the CEOM offers a sponsorship program in the area of religious education and theology. Many teachers and RECs have had release time from schools as a means of assisting them to add to their qualifications. The continued development of post-graduate courses in religious education offered by Australian Catholic University has made courses available more related to the needs of people in schools. Some schools assist RECs in the payment of costs associated with study and with release time for study. With the increasingly high cost of courses and the demands on staff from school and family, the issue of assisting RECs in particular to gain qualifications is one that needs to be continually addressed.

Experience of the RECs

The experience of RECs relates to three major areas, namely their years of experience as a teacher; years of experience as a religious education teacher; and years of experience as an REC.

Figure 4.10 The average years of experience of an REC as a teacher of religious education.
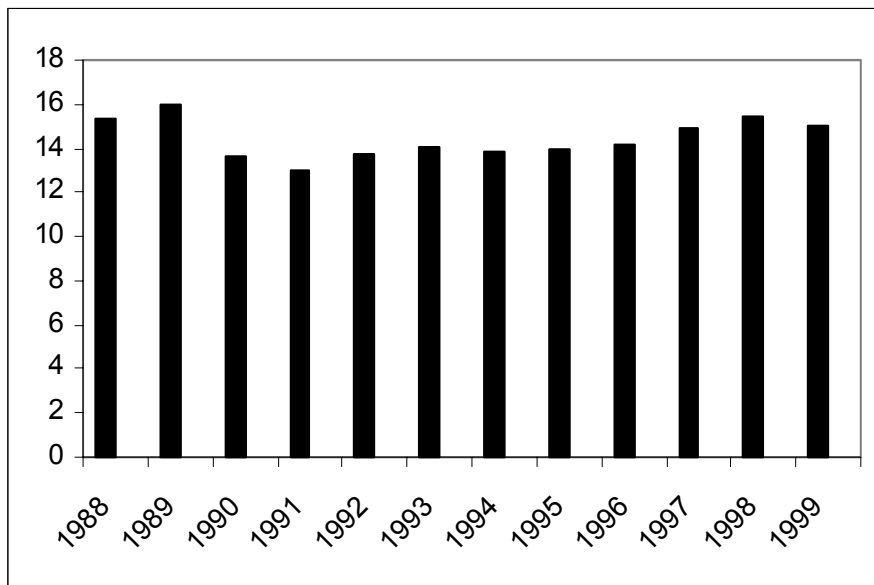
The data indicates that the average years of experience of RECs as religious education teachers is high and ranges from twelve years to sixteen years. This trend indicates that RECs do have significant teaching experience that they bring to the role of religious education coordination.

As some RECs have been appointed to the role in different schools this data relates to years of experience both within their current school and any previous school as well.

Figure 4.11 The average years of experience of being an REC
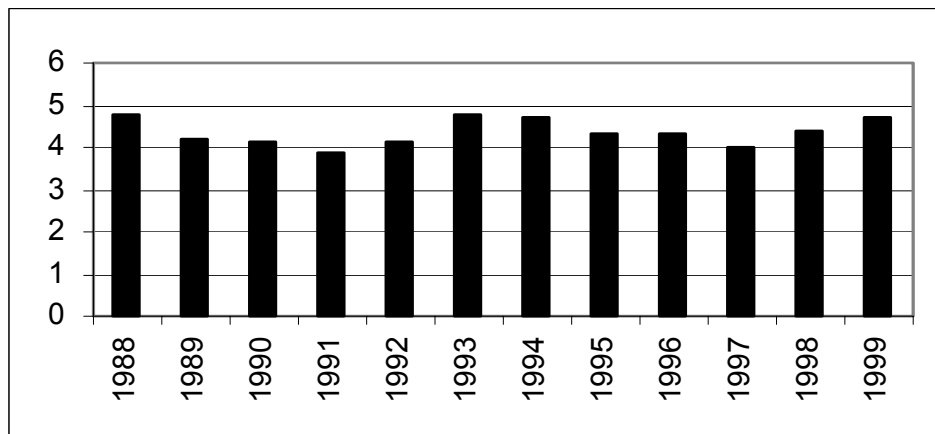
Figure 4.11 shows that the trend data for years of experience is between 3.9 and 4.8 years. Whether this is a sufficient number of years is open to discussion. However, contracts for Deputy Principals and Principals range from five to seven years, a time span that is deemed necessary for their role. If the role of the RECs is of similar importance in schools they would also need similar time in their initial appointment so that they can attend meaningfully to their role and develop sustained knowledge and experience within in.

The next figure contains the years of experience of RECs in their current school and not their total REC experience.

Figure 4.12 Average years of being an REC in current school
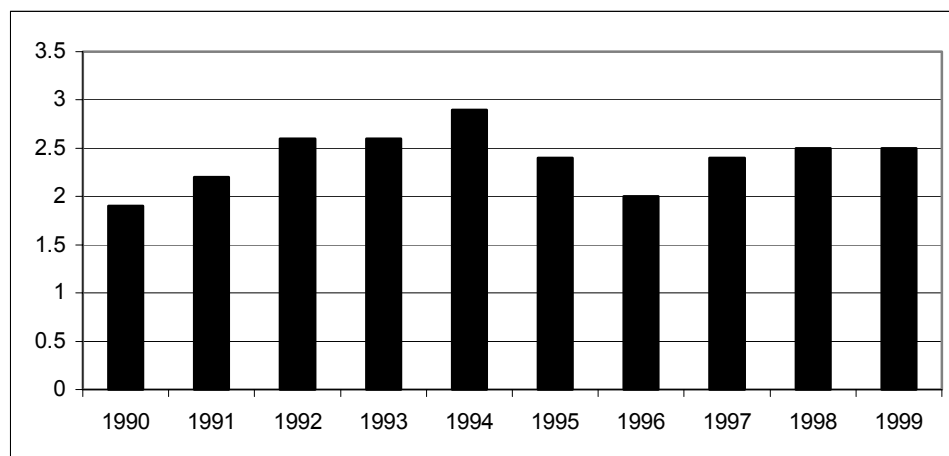
As mentioned in Section 4.2, the industrial conditions relating to appointment of people to special administrative roles within Catholic schools have required staff to apply (and reapply) for these positions every two to three years. This means that every two to three years people either move out of the role or reapply. The range of 1.9 to 2.9 years as the average length of time that RECS stay in the position suggests that they are using the opportunity that arises because of the industrial agreement to leave the position after one term of office. This is reinforced in Figure 4.13 that records the number of new people who take on the role of REC each year.

Figure 4.13 The percentage of new people into the role of REC, assistant REC or year level coordinator of religious education
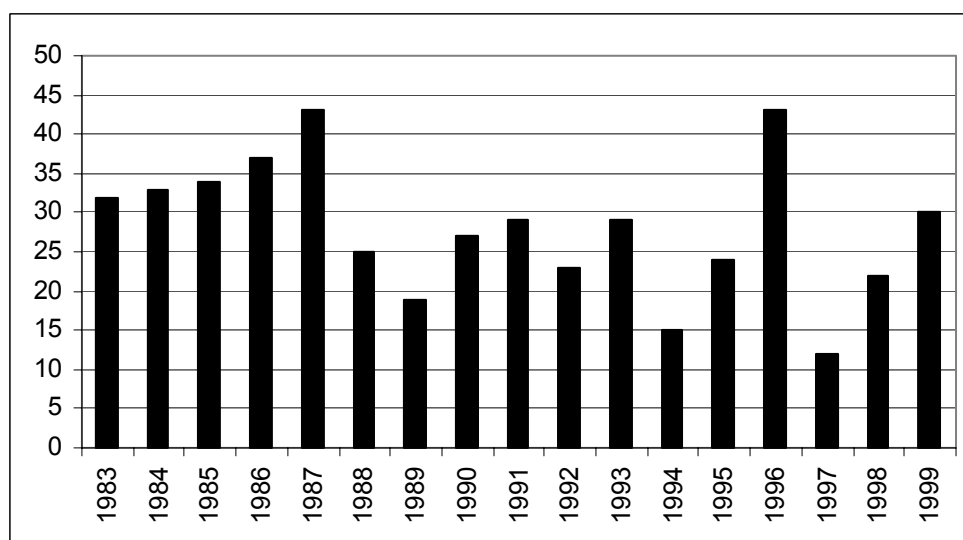
The annual change of RECs is 25-30% or one in four. This high turnover of RECs has been a consistent factor since the surveys have been undertaken, and one may

reasonably assume prior to that time as well. This raises planning issues for schools and for central authorities as well as many questions about the reasons for this phenomenon.

Time release for RECs

This data relates the average hours of release time per school during the period 1982-1999. Time per school reflects the sum of time given to all those who had specific time allocation for all or part of the REC role. In some schools the structure was to have one person in the role, in other schools the role was shared by two or more people.

Figure 4.14 Average hours time release per school
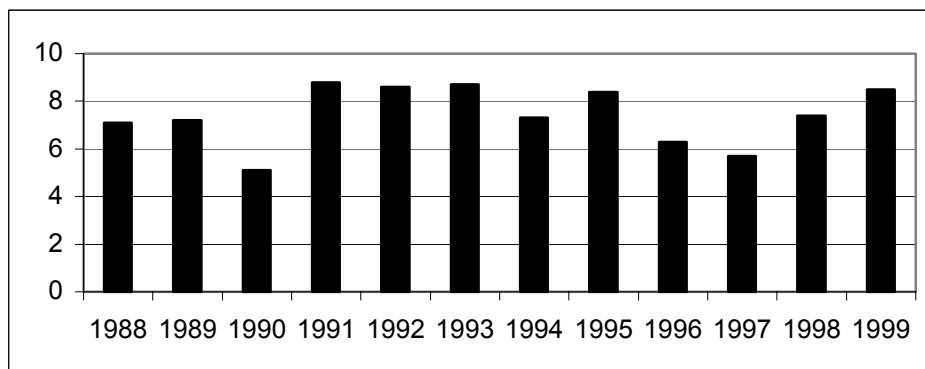
There are peaks and troughs in the hours per school. The highest points in 1991-1993 follow the very lowest point in 1990. These variations can be partly explained once again by examining the industrial background. In 1991 the AST (Advanced Skilled Teacher) position was introduced as part of the teaching award. This gave teachers with many years' experience the opportunity to be classified as an AST and to be given a small monetary and/or time allowance. At the same time PORs (Positions of Responsibility Level 1 and 2) were introduced, and one of the consequences was that many people in schools were given time allocations for their role. During these initial years of the Advanced Skilled Teacher Award, many small time allocations were made to many staff, which added to the total number of hours given to religious education coordination.

Time release can also be examined by determining the number of hours each person has in the role of REC (Figure 4.15).

Figure 4.15 Average hours given per REC for religious education coordination.
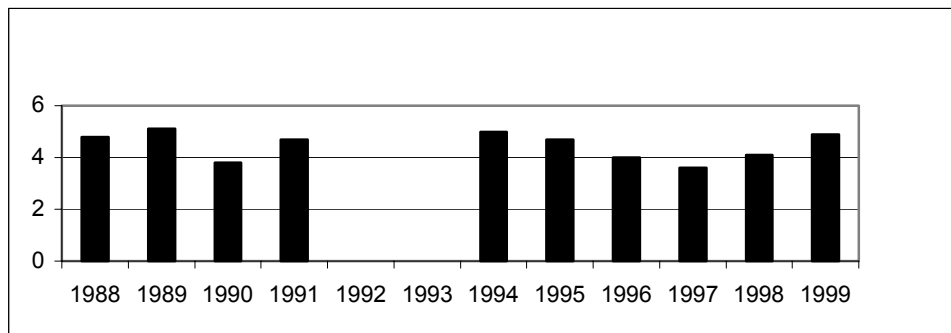
The data (in hours) for 1992, 1993 is not available. Data in those years was calculated as a percentage of teaching time and could not converted to hours.

The place of RECs on School Leadership/Administrative Teams

One of the most important teams within schools is the Leadership/Administrative team. While there is no one structure used across schools the structure usually consists of some combination of the following: the Principal, Deputy Principal, Curriculum Coordinator, Representative of Year Level Coordinators, Pastoral Care Person, REC. Certainly, from the point of view of staff members, this team is very important, and to have REC representation on that team gives a public statement regarding the status and importance of the role. Figure 4.16 below compares the number of RECs who have been members of the Leadership/Administrative teams with the number of schools. As each school has only one such team, the percentage is represented as per school.

Figure 4.16 Comparison of the number of schools with the number of RECs on admin in schools
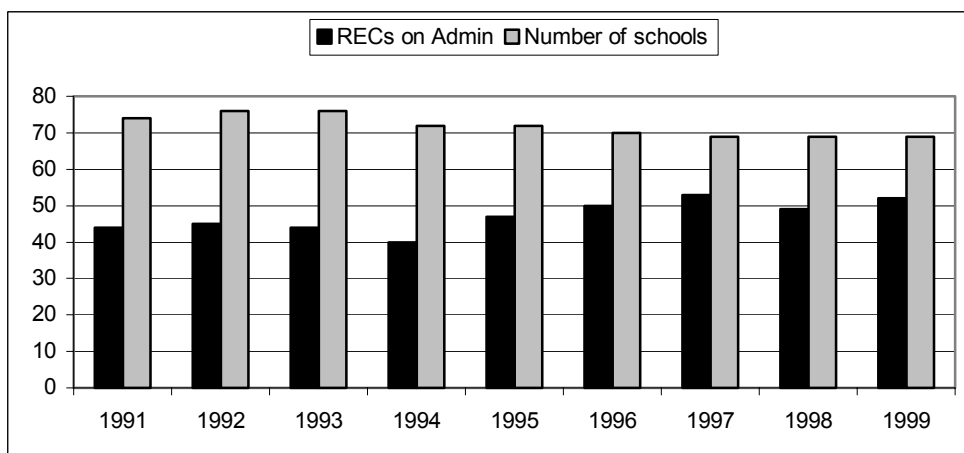
4.6 Role descriptions of RECs from various CEOs

In this section the role descriptions of RECs as expressed in policy and guideline statements from various CEOs around Australia are examined with the purpose of finding out the conceptualisation of the role from the point of view of the central Catholic agency responsible for schools. Since the 1970s there have been many statements on the role produced by various CEOs. To analyse all of these would require a separate thesis. Nevertheless, it is important to explore them in general as they provide points of comparison with the CEOM's understanding of the role. The researcher has made a selection from a range of CEOs on key aspects of the role as indicative samples of role descriptions across various dioceses.

In 1979 the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn articulated the areas of responsibility for the REC. The breadth of the role is clearly evident (Figure 4.17). The eight items represent broad areas under which the responsibilities of the REC would be articulated within the role.

Figure 4.17 Areas of responsibility of the REC (Canberra-Goulburn, 1979)

1. The Religious Education Coordinator and the Catholic school
2. The Religious Education Coordinator and the school Principal
3. The Religious Education Coordinator and liaison with priests
4. The Religious Education Coordinator as leader of the RE Team
5. The Religious Education Coordinator and teachers
6. The Religious Education Coordinator and the school RE program
7. The Religious Education Coordinator and parents
8. The Religious Education Coordinator and resources

In Chapter Three of this thesis religious education was described as having three strands or contexts: Strand 1, the classroom; Strand 2, outside the classroom; Strand 3, the broad dimensions of religious education within the whole school. These strands are used as a means of analysing the role descriptions. The role description of the REC (Figure 4.17) can be grouped in the following ways:

Strand 1: Items 4, 5, 6, 8.

Strand 2: No items.

Strand 3: Items, 1, 2, 3, 7.

No explicit mention is made of the strand of religious education that operates outside the classroom. It could be assumed that this was embedded in item 6, the school program. However, it is not explicit.

In 1984 the Archdiocese of Hobart described the role in a different manner (Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18 Description of the role of the REC (Hobart Archdiocese, 1984)

1. Coordinates religious education throughout the school
2. Religious education coordination is different from other subject coordination
3. It encompasses the whole Catholic ethos of the school and all that this implies
4. The Principal and Religious Education Coordinator will define the Coordinator's role
5. Holds a central position in the educational mission of the Church
6. Concern for the development and enrichment of the school as a vital faith community
7. Programming of the religious education curriculum
8. Teacher assistance
9. Liturgical, prayer
10. Maintaining resources

During the interviews with RECs, which will be described later in this thesis, they commented that in their day-to-day role, the work outside the classroom was far more time consuming and demanding than the classroom curriculum role. Other RECs interviewed wanted to devote more time to the classroom religious education curriculum. The breakdown of the items in the role description from Hobart has religious education curriculum within the classroom as the major focus"

Strand 1: Items 1, 2, 7, 8, 10.
Strand 2: Items 6, 9.
Strand 3: items 3, 4, 5.

According to the Hobart document the primary responsibility of the REC is the religious education curriculum.

In 1994 the Catholic Education Office, Sydney also established a list of expectations of the role (Figure 4.19). The breakdown across the three strands was:

Strand 1: Items 2, 4.
Strand 2: Item 1.
Strand 3: Items 3, 5.

What stands out in a historical sense in these expectations is number five – participating as a member of the Executive Team. At this stage in the development of the role, RECs were not leaders in the general sense of the term, but had reached a stage where they were ex-officio members of the central team in the school.

Figure 4.19 Role expectations of RECs (CEO, Sydney, 1994)

1. Giving leadership in religious education and the liturgical and faith life of the school
2. Coordinating classroom programs in religious education so as to ensure quality teaching and learning
3. Nurturing positive human relations in the school community
4. Administering the organisational, resource and record-keeping aspects of the religious education program
5. Participating as a member of the Executive Team

During the 1990s what emerged from a number of CEOs were criteria by which RECs would be assessed when they applied for the role. By 1997 the Diocese of Parramatta had established specific criteria for the selection of RECs in their schools (Figure 4.20). The criteria were broken into personal and faith qualities on the one hand, and professional qualities on the other:

Personal and faith qualities: Items 1, 2, 4.

Educational qualities: Items 3, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Figure 4.20 Criteria for selection to position of REC (Parramatta Diocese, 1997)

1. Practicing Catholic

2. Appreciation of the tradition

3. Awareness of contemporary expressions in religious education

4. Committed to Catholic education

5. Sound knowledge of religious education principles

6. Four-year trained teacher

7. At least five years experience as religious education teacher

8. Academic background in Scripture, liturgy, theology, religious education

The Brisbane CEO in 1997 also developed a list of essential criteria for the role of REC (Figure 4.21). These criteria are the most pronounced in applying educational criteria to the role:

Personal and faith qualities: Items 1, 2.

Educational qualities: Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

Table 4.21 Essential criteria for role of REC (CEO, Brisbane, 1997)

1. Committed Catholic

2. Understanding of and commitment to education in the Catholic tradition

3. Four-year teaching degree

4. Masters degree in religious education (or equivalent)

5. Successful secondary teaching

6. Minimum of five years of religious education teaching

7. Administrative experience

8. Teacher registration

9. Demonstrated knowledge of contemporary religious education curriculum.

4.7 School role statements of REC

Since the mid-1970s individual schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne have written role statements on RECs (Appendices 11-13). Analysis of a number of these from the period of this thesis (1970-2000) reveals a remarkable uniformity in the broad tasks that have been expected in the role. What is of note is that there is very little local difference in the role. In general there are two broad areas of responsibility. The first is the responsibility that comes under the heading of the religious education classroom curriculum. The second area is what occurs outside the classroom in terms of liturgy, retreats and social justice activities. In these areas there are a number of other tasks that are also common: building and working with a team of religious educators; communication with parents and the broader community of school and church; maintenance and building up of religious education resources.

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, in recent years a significant number of schools have split the role of the REC in order to share the burden. Two examples of the approach which involves dividing the role by two schools, one a religious order-controlled girls' school, the other a diocesan-controlled co-educational school, are outlined below.

School A, a religious order girls' school, has divided the role into a curriculum development role and a faith development role. In this school the title REC is given to both these roles (Figure 4.22).

Figure 4.22 School A: Division of the role of the REC

REC – Curriculum Development	REC – Faith Development
RE program	Growth and faith in prayer, liturgy, retreats
Classroom	Understanding & actions based on learning's
Involves knowing & learning	Planning classroom liturgy & prayer
Leads RE faculty	Works with staff and students in faith activities
Audits curriculum	Retreat work
Implements curriculum change	Spirituality of all in the school community
Encourages Christian living	

School B, a Catholic Education Office co-educational school, has divided the role in the manner that the majority of schools who have opted for this approach have done. The role is divided into REC and Faith Development Coordinator (FDC) (Figure 4.23).

Figure 4.23 School B: Division of the role of the REC

Religious Education Coordinator	Faith Development Coordinator
Develops formal RE curriculum	Sequenced retreat, seminar, prayer sessions
Evaluates the RE program	Develops liturgy committees
Student RE reports	Coordinates school Eucharist
Supports teachers of RE	Coordinates class Eucharists
Administers accreditation	Daily prayer
Assessment of RE	Staff prayer
Budget	Chaplains
Links with other curriculum areas	Social action groups
Attend regional meetings	religious music

4.8 Conclusion

Data analyses in this chapter provide a historical framework within which the empirical component will be evaluated later in this thesis. During the thirty-year period in which RECs had been working in Catholic secondary schools, the CEOM played a significant role, particularly in religious education curriculum. At significant moments (cf. Section 4.2) in that time the CEOM called special meetings of RECs for the purposes of professional development. As outlined, through these meetings, among other things, the CEOM helped RECs to work towards a theoretical framework for the role at a school level. Other historical data also highlights that RECs regularly pointed out their concerns about the role. They were hoping for some centralised response to assist them at the school level. The CEOM has not provided what the RECs were asking for in this area.

Emerging out of the survey data are concerns about the turnover rate of RECs (cf. Section 4.3). That and other data provide an invaluable overview of the individuals in the role, and their experience, qualifications and functions within the

schools. Some of the trends are very clear. RECs are now more qualified in religious education that at any previous stage in their history. However, this has had no impact on the turnover rate. Moreover, while the role has grown in complexity the time allowance has remained relatively constant. The data shows the additional workload of RECs as part of their being recognised and treated as significant leaders in the schools. The responses at the school level have been to divide the role into REC and FDC. The empirical component of this thesis uses the data that has been presented in this chapter as a basis for exploring with the RECs how they have perceived their role.

Chapter Five

Analysis of research into the role of the REC

5.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have explored the theoretical perspectives on religious education in Church documents and in the work of researchers whose focus was the nature and purpose of religious education. In Chapter Four the role of the REC was examined in relation to its historical development, with particular emphasis on the Archdiocese of Melbourne and its administrative arm, the Catholic Education Office. The aim of this chapter is to present an analysis of research into the role of the REC within the Australian context as a background to the empirical research presented in Chapters Six to Ten.

This research into religious education has been arranged into three categories. First, there is an examination of the empirical research that has been carried out on the REC's role. In relation to this research, this present thesis is the first doctoral study on the role of the REC. Therefore, this thesis represents a starting point to research in this critical area, and also provides a framework from which further research can emerge. Much of the minor research into the role of the REC has been undertaken in primary school settings. In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, there has been only one piece of research prior to this thesis.

The second category relates to research in other areas of religious education – research whose primary focus was of religious education teachers, but which has drawn upon RECs as a secondary source. Recent research on teachers of religious education (Malone 1990; Welbourne 1995; Engebretson 1995; Rymarz 1997) provides valuable data that assists in understanding the role of the REC. In a number of these studies, RECs were the chief source of data collection, and therefore the studies contain invaluable information about perceptions of RECs in regard to religious education and to religious education teachers.

A third category research involves minor research and occasional theoretical papers on the role of RECs. Often this research is focused on a particular aspect of the role of REC.

5.2 Empirical research into the role of the REC

<u>Woodhouse (1983)</u>

In her post-graduate studies in leadership, Woodhouse (1983) explored the role effectiveness of RECs in the Archdiocese of Sydney in both primary and secondary schools. This limited research investigated the perceptions of RECs in relation to their role, as well as the perceptions of teachers of religious education and Principals of schools. The role of the REC was examined in the light of a 1979 religious education draft document produced by the CEO, Sydney. This document proposed that the role of the REC was "one of leadership, guidance and service" (CEO, Sydney, 1979, p. 1). A final version of this document was produced in 1982 and there was a significant change in the text. The new version describes the role as "one of leadership, witness, guidance and service" (CEO, Sydney, 1982, p. 3). Inclusion of the concept of 'witness' can be traced to *Lay Catholics in Schools – Witnesses to Faith,* a document which was analysed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Woodhouse explored the effectiveness of RECs according to an effectiveness scale (Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968). In addition, the effectiveness was measured against a framework that had been established by the CEO, Sydney. The findings are presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Criteria for assessing the effectiveness of RECs

The REC should:

- Be sensitive to the needs of the teachers
- Should be fair and just
- Help teachers choose and prepare materials
- Select content appropriate to different grade levels within the school, works with the staff to draw up a coordinated Program in Religious education
- Ensures that official notices, instructions and directions issued by the CEO are brought to the notice of teachers.

Woodhouse outlines her understanding of the role, and suggests that the primary tasks of the REC involve the support and encouragement of religious education staff, affirming what is worthwhile in their efforts and building up their morale. The REC is to arrange meetings for the religious education teachers and to meet individually with each staff member.

Woodhouse's findings suggest that the greatest challenge for the RECs was the necessity to devise a religious education program in their particular school. This thesis provides evidence that this curriculum task was too difficult for RECs to undertake. Much of this was a result of poor quality religious education teachers, and Woodhouse argued that lay teachers of religious education required in-service in theology, liturgy, prayer and catechetical method.

Before proceeding with the empirical section of her research, Woodhouse developed a conceptual model of religious education and the role of the REC:

> The Religious Education Coordinator should be seen as a person seeking to live a Christian witness, and always attempting to understand the witness of others. She must have a clear understanding of and be more than casually interested in the Philosophy of Catholic Education. As well as being able to verbalise the aims of a specific Catholic School, she has to try and implement these… It is essential that the REC be a person of prayer (Woodhouse, 1983, p. 10).

Woodhouse surveyed RECs and religious education teachers through an extensive questionnaire about the effectiveness of the REC's role. The findings were presented but little interpretation was provided. For example, among the many findings was the observation that some 60% of the RECs saw their role as very important to the school and believed that their role efficiency was very high. On the other hand, 20% of the Coordinators did not enjoy their role. Furthermore, 68% said that they were able to contribute to some decisions and have influence on the implementation of those decisions. It is regrettable that more effective analysis of the data and its implications was not provided.

The second part of the research by Woodhouse involved the interviewing of a very small sample of Principals in order to gain their perceptions of the role of the REC. Woodhouse concluded that in order to function effectively the REC needed

the active support of the Principal and Deputy (Woodhouse, 1983, p. 43). It was also important that the Principal should have a clear understanding of the role of the REC, and that her or his model of religious education should be well understood:

> If religious education is to be given top priority in a school the RECs must have the explicit, active support of the Principal (Woodhouse, 1983, p. 59).

In the findings of her research Woodhouse made the following final observations concerning the role of the REC:

> The position of REC then is quite a complex one. The person who takes up such a position in a Catholic Secondary School requires, I think, special qualities of personality, the academic qualifications required by any teacher, as well as some qualifications in the field of religious education (Woodhouse, 1983, p. 61).

The demands of the role, as Woodhouse described them, are diverse and the person who accepts the role has a range of expected qualitative beyond the coordinator of other subject areas.

Johnson (1989)

Exploring the role of the REC within the framework of the mission and ministry of the Church was the focus of the research of Johnson (1989). This study examined the role of RECs in primary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney, and conceptualised the role within a catechetical framework and not an educational one.

The main purpose of the study was to focus attention on the role of the Religious Education Coordinator in primary schools by defining their mission and ministry. The mission of the REC was seen to be embedded in the evangelical mission of the Church. As such the ministry of the role of REC was the practical expression of her or his mission within the Church (Johnson, 1989, p. 176).

For Johnson, RECs need to be first and foremost people of faith, whose purpose is to communicate and give witness to faith. No mention is made of their educational abilities or their technical and management skills in coordinating a team of religious education teachers. The REC, as described by Johnson, is in that sense

one-dimensional. A summary of the faith dimensions, as outlined by Johnson, of the role is given in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Faith dimensions of the role of the REC

Strong personal faith drives what the REC does.

The REC's own faith story will be shared with others.

The mission of the REC is to live in friendship with God and share in the ministry of Jesus.

To be an authentic witness the REC must be seen to be real, struggling to live the Christian Faith.

RECs are role models, mentors and communicators of Gospel values.

The RECs are custodians of God's word.

The REC's role is to reawaken the mind and hearts of all to God's loving presence in their lives.

RECs are commissioned to reveal a loving, redeeming God.

This faith role of the REC was summed up as follows:

> Accepting the responsibility of leading and directing others, brings with it the challenge of striving to exemplify the ideals and values they proclaim. To be able to do this, Religious Education Coordinators need to sustain their own faith by being people whose prayer-life is steeped in the Scriptures and nourished by the Sacraments and communal sharing (Johnson, 1989, p. 183).

Johnson analysed twenty-two documents on the role of the REC from various CEOs, and constructed six broad areas of responsibility with corresponding duties: as *leader of religious education teachers* (thirteen specific duties); as *facilitator of school liturgy* (fourteen specific duties); as *convenor of staff* (twelve specific duties); as *designer of curriculum* (fifteen specific duties); as *liaison person* with parents (seven specific duties), with priests (five specific duties) and with community (five specific duties); as *manager of resources* (nine specific duties).

On the basis of these duties Johnson constructed 106 questions that were given to RECs in the inner western region of the Archdiocese of Sydney. The

volume of data collected was substantial and the major findings are summarised in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Key positive and negative aspects of the role of REC

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Positives in the role
High morale
Members of the executive
Liturgy/Sacraments consume all the time

Negatives in the role
30% of staff does not attend religious education professional development
Insufficient time to perform role
Lack of peer support

</div>

Johnson made a number of recommendations in relation to the REC in Catholic schools. To ensure that the Catholic character of schools is maintained, Principals and RECs need to continue to make religious education the highest priority in the school. In order to do this, RECs need to deepen their own spirituality. One of the greatest problems for the RECs was the lack of staff support and enthusiasm for the religious education program, so it was important to devote staff-meetings to sharing pertinent segments from appropriate Church documents in an effort to deepen the understanding of the role of religious education teachers. As the distribution of religious education resources was found to be a time consuming task, it was also recommended that the REC train another member of staff to assist with the circulation and storage of these materials. To ensure that all staff members were aware of the emphasis of the RECs during their release time, it was recommended that the priorities of the term, or year if possible, be outlined at the first staff meeting of the new year. As a general need for further assistance in the area of curriculum evaluation was recorded in the study, it was also recommended that RECs take advantage of the skills of the personnel from the CEO to assist them.

The focus of Johnson's conceptualisation of the role was the emphasis on the faith dimension of the REC. It placed great emphasis on the personal and faith qualities of the person in the role and this should not be underplayed. However, such conceptualisation suggests a religious life model with references to RECs being "called" and responding to their "vocation". Furthermore, the conceptualisation is based on the RECs personal response to Jesus in Scripture. The effectiveness of

RECs is judged by that relationship. The chief limitation of the 'vocational' argument is that it fails to take into account any educational and pedagogical components of the role, implying that being a person of faith is all that is required. Certainly, there are elements of the role that are strongly vocational, but limiting the role to those elements ignores other more educational dimensions of the role.

Slattery (1989)

An examination of the perceived role of the RECs in Catholic secondary schools in the Diocese of Broken Bay, NSW, was undertaken by Michael Slattery (1989). The research was prompted by a number of factors. Among them was the fact that Broken Bay had recently become a diocese in 1987. The primary reason given was that "Religious Education Coordinators belonging to the diocese expressed their concern regarding the need for role clarification" (Slattery, 1989, Abstract). In the context of the research a number of problems were addressed.

An important contribution of the study lay in the historical data that was used (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 Historical development of the role of REC in Broken Bay

Throughout the 1970-1988 period, the position of REC and its place in the hierarchy of the Catholic school experienced considerable change.

February 1970 RECs were appointed within Brown Josephite schools in a pilot program.

February 1974 the CEO commended the appointment of RECs in all Catholic secondary schools.

Members of religious orders remained in REC positions until the late 1970s.

Late 1970s RECs began to express the feeling that they held token positions in their school and had no meaningful input in the overall determinations of policy-making. They were not paid a coordinator's allowance until 1979, yet prior to this they were expected to perform duties similar in nature to other paid coordinators.

Since 1985, all RECs have been expected to perform as active members of the school executive.

The role of the REC, as reported by Slattery, related to the expectations of the CEO that the REC needed to perform duties outside those expected of other subject coordinators. Other subject coordinators needed only to encourage and direct curriculum development within their particular faculty and teaching area, while the REC needs to be aware of all curriculum areas being taught within the Catholic school to ensure that values based on Jesus Christ and the Gospels are being monitored and maintained. Their work also involves the development of the total curriculum, including religious education, pastoral care, teacher development, liturgical programming, retreat organisation and parent education and information.

It was also recognised that while there is strength in a centralised role description such as the one given by the local CEO, there needed to be flexibility at the local school. It was quite possible, Slattery concluded, that the role statement documented by the religious education department of the CEO might be different from the perceived role of the REC within a Catholic school.

A very important contribution to research in this thesis was the recording and analysis of a number of other pieces of research into the role of the REC. Slattery cites the work of McCourt, Black and Stuart.[6]

Black (1986)

Black undertook research into the role of the REC in Brisbane from the late 1970s until the early 1980s. The Brisbane Catholic Education Office had developed a list of generic tasks that would be undertaken by the REC, but believed that it was essential that the REC perspective on the role be incorporated into any CEO document. As a result of a number of interviews undertaken by Black, she concluded that:

> The result of this process was that the Brisbane CEO proposed a policy which indicated that there would be a change to the traditional role of the REC… The job was divided into two positions whereby the REC would fulfil the normal duties of any subject coordinator, whilst the Assistant

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[6] Unfortunately, Slattery's bibliographical references to these works were not particularly clear. Extensive investigation by ACU research library staff has failed to locate these original resources. Nevertheless, the treatment of these three works is reasonably extensive and is offered in good faith from the point of view of Slattery.

to the Principal [Religious Education] would fulfil the requirements as a member of the executive and adviser to the Principal. This new direction has met with mixed reaction (Slattery, 1989, p. 39).

The Brisbane CEO adopted this proposal as the model for the REC and it is now the policy for Catholic schools.

McCourt (1981)

In a minor study, McCourt researched the REC in the context of the Christian school, presented a model for leadership within such a community, and explored the interaction between the REC and the individuals and groups within the total school community (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 Key findings about the role of the REC

The REC works with others in determining the school's formulation into a Christian community.
The way in which the REC relates to each of the other leaders of the school will be the greatest determinant of failure or success.
The REC needs to be proficient in communication skills.
The REC needs to be aware of the level of the skills that exist in the school community.
Genuine personal relationships give the process of leadership a more solid basis.

McCourt listed the eight components of the role of the REC as: class work programs; liturgy and prayer; apostolic work; pastoral care; Christian living camps; staff development; parent involvement; resources. He concluded, "I have found the role a very difficult one to define in terms of set duties because of their diversity" (Slattery, 1989, p. 42).

Stuart (1981)

Stuart undertook research into the role of the REC in 1981 in Adelaide. She sought to gather information about the role and what the REC perceived as her or his needs. Her first finding focused on the need for training courses for RECs in

the theory of religious education curriculum, and the skills of development and coordination. Furthermore, there was a need for knowledge of both Scripture and theology. In the area of faith development, skills in the spiritual formation of children and adults, and in planning and designing liturgies, were also important.

Stuart also found that if the role of the REC was to become more attractive to competent teachers, it must offer a clear and positive status. In addition, in order to cope with the demands of the job, more time must be allocated to the coordinator, so time release should be an integral part of the role. The time allocation should be fair, and should be based on the number of children and staff in the school. To assist in relieving the time pressure, the REC should not hold the position of class teacher. Certainly, it was seen to be important that the REC had contact with various classes so as to know the children in the school and to be in touch with their needs.

The research stated definitely that the CEOM ought to support the role of the REC and should mandate certain policies for schools:

> The CEO [should] put forward some documentation about the role of the REC. I envisage this in the form of guidelines which could be adapted at the school level. This would give the RECs a more solid understanding of their role and more confidence in performing it. The role of the REC is both challenging and exciting. It is certainly a necessary function within the life of the Catholic school. Religious education is at the very heart of the existence of Catholic schools. The REC should be looked after in a professional manner with the conditions that are necessary to enable the person to be most effective (Slattery, 1989, pp. 43-44).

The research involved a survey containing thirty statements about the role of the REC that was given to four focus groups. Four items about the role were of particular importance to these groups:

- to keep the executive informed concerning the development and implementation of the religious education curriculum
- to develop appropriate rationale for religious education
- to devise departmental procedures to support the religious education curriculum
- to consult with all concerned parties.

Stuart concluded that schools could enhance the role of the REC is a number of ways. Her findings are outlined in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Ways to enhance the role of the REC in schools

Cooperation between staff, clergy, parents, students and the REC.

Executive support for religious education.

Acceptance and awareness by staff of the purpose of religious education.

Suitable and relevant religious education programs.

Sufficient time allowance.

A spirit of support between Principal and REC.

Cooperative and professional relationship between staff and REC.

Cooperative and professional relationship between members of the executive and REC.

Education of all members of the school community in the aims of the Catholic school.

Sierakowski (1991)

The focus of research by Sierakowski (1991) was the role of the REC in Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Even though the context of this research was primary schools, the research was significant because it was the only research that has been undertaken, prior to the empirical study reported later in this thesis, on the role of RECs in that Archdiocese. As stated in previous chapters the relationship of the CEOM to schools is different from the other research contexts. In the study by Sierakowski the focus was "what is the lived experience of fulfilling the role of REC" (Sierakowski, 1991, p. 1). The study explores the role of the REC under the following headings: entry into the role; issues relating to the role; positive aspects of the role; teamwork; change; miscellaneous.

Of particular interest for Sierakowski was the selection process for RECs. Many of the RECs said in their interviews that there were no clear directions for the role, there were no guidelines and the role had to be developed from nothing. Many stated that "it wasn't clear what was expected of you" (Sierakowski, 1991, p. 73). Her major findings are presented in Figure 5.7.

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Figure 5.7 Major findings about the role of the REC

No established or systematic pattern for appointing RECs.

Induction processes for RECs need to be developed.

Most common factor in data was lack of time associated with the role.

Lack of status in the role.

Perceptions that no one else wants the role.

Work tasks vary enormously from school to school.

Many positive aspects to the role.

Need for role description to be clear.

RECs who are Assistant to Principal are in better position to facilitate religious education

Importance of the religious education networks

In summary Sierakowski concluded:

> There was a general feeling from those RECs interviewed of a lack of kudos for the role of the REC… Tensions are evident between the status that RECs perceived that they should have and the reality. They believe that the role is a key one in a Catholic school and, as such, it should carry the status it deserves as well as the resources to support it. There appears to be a gap between their beliefs and their perceptions of the value others place on the role (Sierakowski, 1991, p. 108).

Her interviews with RECs raised four major areas of concern. The first was a concern about some classroom teachers' lack of knowledge and religious education background. The second related to religious education being a 'touchy' area. This expression was used in discussions about the faith dimensions of religious education. The lack of clarity about the faith dimension in the classroom, and the desire not to 'force' faith onto the students, resulted in it being "touchy". The third related to a question of the status of religious education in relation to other curriculum areas, and the fourth was a concern about the commitment of teachers to the religious education program (Sierakowski, 1991, p. 77).

<u>Carroll (1992)</u>

The ethnographic study into the role of the REC by Carroll, who was a REC in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in the 1970s, was sparked by her experience that there was a high turnover rate of RECs. She wanted to explore what made the job so difficult for them:

> My concern is to describe what is different about this role compared to other subject coordinators, using the RECs' perceptions as the primary data. What is it like to be an REC in a Catholic Secondary School? Areas for exploration include motivation for seeking the position; for continuing in the job; role description; sources of satisfaction and frustration (Carroll, 1992, p. 1).

Carroll gives a brief historical account of the early days of development of the role in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and attributes the establishment of the role to the educational emphasis that was central to the *Guidelines* and to the decline of vowed women and men religious in Catholic schools.

Carroll's research delineated two models of religious education coordination:

> Thus depending on the direction of the diocese and/or the school Principal, two models of the REC's role description seem to exist. The first sees the REC as the de facto guardian of the faith dimension of Catholic Schools supported by the priority of tasks listed in official role descriptions. The second model, expressed especially in the writings of Crawford and Rossiter (1990), described the REC as a curriculum coordinator. The ambiguity attached to this position was compounded by the lack of research available. Even a search of conference papers found little. The recent publication *Leadership in Catholic Education* (McMahon et al., 1990) focused upon the Principal with no direct acknowledgement of the RECs role as leader in Catholic Education (Carroll, 1992, p. 4).

5.3 Reports and projects on the role of the REC

The second collection of research data relates to specific projects, reports and theoretical papers on the role of the REC. They are often limited in scope and focus on particular issues in connection to the REC role. Nevertheless, they

contribute substantially to what is known about the role and how it functions within school and/or diocesan settings. As previously indicated, there is a small volume of literature in this area and much of it was published by Australian Catholic University in its religious education journal, *Word in Life: Journal of Religious Education*, in 1998.

Blahut and Bezzina (1998)

In their article "The Primary Religious Education Coordinator: Role demands and the job turnover in the Diocese of Parramatta", Blahut and Bezzina (1998) argued that the role of the REC in the primary schools in the diocese of Parramatta has had to cope with both educational and ecclesial changes in recent years. This has come about due to the shift to greater lay responsibility for school leadership and administration, and the requirement for increased qualifications in religious education. Their particular concern was:

> …. that the Diocese of Parramatta is facing significant challenges as a consequence of rapid turnover of appointees to the REC roles. This matter is one of concern, not only because of the disruption to schools and the system, but more importantly because of the effect on students and teachers (Blahut & Bezzina, 1998, p. 2).

Data from 1990 to 1996 presented by the researchers indicated that approximately 25% of RECs changed roles annually. Of the 85 movements of RECs in this period, twenty-one (26.7%) received promotions; forty-five (56.3%) returned to classroom duties; three (4%) undertook other coordinating roles. Of all the RECS who left the role in this period, only forty-four had served more than two years. Furthermore, only nineteen of the 120 who were RECs had experience in some other coordinating role prior to the REC position.

In their research with current and past RECs, Blahut and Bezzina ascertained that the greatest demands on the time and energy of the REC was in the area of liturgy and pastoral care, mainly because of the high public profile of these areas within the school. Of grave concern to the RECs was the neglect of religious education curriculum and of the teaching of religious education in the classroom that resulted from these other work demands.

On the basis of these interviews with thirteen RECs about the issues of turnover and demands in the role, a number of hypotheses emerged. Blahut and Bezzina isolated a range of disincentives for people taking on the role and reasons why people left the role after a very short time:

Figure 5.8 Disincentives in the role of REC

The regularity of interruptions of and demands on the REC places strains on their own teaching which go beyond those for other coordinators.

The nature of the role gives rise to perceptions of the REC as the public face of the religious ethos of the school, placing demands on people.

The fact that they are ex-officio members of the school executive, perhaps before they are sufficiently experienced as coordinators creates ambivalence on the part of other staff.

Insufficient training and induction leave them ill equipped for the role.

The role is perceived as diffuse, appearing to put both RE curriculum and the religious life of the school in the RECs' strand.

They also found that currently many of the RECs were inexperienced in the area of school leadership and administration:

> [We can say] that the current REC population is largely inexperienced. It can also be seen that the majority do not move out of the role for promotion, rather moving back into fulltime classroom duties. Further a significant proportion leave the role after a very short time (Blahut & Bezzina, 1998, p. 3).

Finally, they concluded that the rate of turnover of RECs was not sustainable, and that action needed to be taken to attract and keep RECs with suitable qualifications and experience. As part of the structure in the Diocese of Parramatta, the REC is automatically a member of the school executive. Blahut and Bezzina concluded that many of the RECs, because of their general lack of school and teaching experience, found the role of the executive to be a cause of greater problems. Furthermore, the emphasis on the liturgical and pastoral elements in the work of the REC was interfering with the primary work of the REC in the areas of

total religious education curriculum development. Schools needed to work out a better balance.

Crotty, L. (1998a)

In an examination of the role of the REC in the Archdiocese of Sydney, Crotty (1998a) argued that the role was continually changing as it attempted to meet the changing needs of Catholic education within a changing Church. Historically the meaning of the role was situated within the directions from Vatican II regarding the mission of Church. Organisationally the role in schools was placed within the middle management positions. Currently, according to Crotty, the difficulty was "in attracting suitable applicants to the role" (Crotty, 1998a, p. 9). She provided a list of factors that contributed to this difficulty. These consisted of low turnover of staff and applicants' inability to effectively participate as members of executive. Her research concluded that the demands of the role, in particular in relation to liturgy and sacramental programs, coincided with those found by Blahut and Bezzina (1998). Crotty concluded:

> Furthermore, in both primary and secondary schools, there is a continuing perception that the role can be too demanding. The demands relate to the liturgical and sacramental functions and connections with the wider church community while attending to religious education curriculum development in the school (Crotty, 1998a, p. 9).

Her research found that many teachers see RECs as overworked and struggling to engage others in the religious life of the school. She gave expression to the voice of RECs who generally could see the 'blow-out' nature of the role where there were more and more demands being made. In particular, the ongoing, public and time-consuming demands of liturgy and sacraments were mentioned:

> These challenges are felt in demands for resources and pastoral time and they emerge in liturgical celebrations, sacramental programs, in the relationship of the school to the people of the parish and in the changing notions of what it means to be parish, Catholic and church (Crotty, 1998a, p. 13).

<u>Rymarz (1997a)</u>

Rymarz (1997a) researched the knowledge needed to be a competent teacher of religious education. As part of that research he interviewed a number of RECs. Adding this to his own experience as an REC in a Catholic secondary school, Rymarz approached the role of the REC from the point of view of curriculum development and implementation. In particular, he conceptualised the curriculum component of the RECs position under the headings: organiser, motivator, seer, understander of the human. He argued that the REC was involved in innumerable tasks "that require a high level of organisational ability and a constant attention to detail and refinement" (Rymarz, 1998, p. 28), and the "expectations placed on the REC can be very demanding, relentless and maddeningly intangible" (Rymarz, 1998, p. 29). In addition, he explored what he called the "elusive and difficult to quantify dimensions of the REC's role" as one of motivation, both of staff and students (Rymarz, 1998, p. 28). Two of the features of this aspect of the REC's role were the element of witness and being able to motivate and encourage the religious education teachers.

The research Rymarz undertook explored the very difficult issue of teacher competence and interest in the teaching of religious education. As indicated in a range of research (Blahut & Bezzina 1998; Crotty 1998a; Rymarz 1997a; Prest 1997), while many religious education teachers and RECs were more highly qualified and experienced than their predecessors, this was not true of all religious education teachers. In some schools it appeared that people were appointed to the position of religious education teacher merely to fill a teaching load and to make up the required number of classes. In this case Rymarz argued:

> A much harder question that can only been mentioned here is, what is the REC to do if they are forced, due to lack of numbers, to use teachers lacking both interest and background in the subject? (Rymarz, 1998, p. 31).

There were critical curricula implications for the REC working with religious education teachers who were ill equipped and lacked interest in the subject. One of the most significant was the necessary time to perform the religious education curriculum duties, and to provide on-the-job training and skilling for religious

education teachers. When situations such as this arose, it raised questions about the status and credibility of religious education within the school context.

D'Orsa (1998)

D'Orsa (1998) explored concepts of leadership and applied them to the role of the REC:

> For RECs, the trap is different. It lies in thinking that their job, by definition, lies in the religious strand, and they may be excused for giving inadequate attention to the other strands. Some have even resented being asked to reach a high level of competence in the educational, technical and human strands. Occasionally, one gets the impression that some RECs seem to believe they should be able to get by on quite an inferior level of performance in these strands. This leads to the perception that some RECs are one-dimensional people, lacking the integration needed in a person who is to lead a school community (D'Orsa, 1998, p. 35).

The challenge issued by D'Orsa is for RECs to resist being placed in a marginal situation, hence being perceived as one-dimensional, as being the 'religious person' on the staff. The REC needs to be known as the person who knows and does 'religious' things, but who also knows and is involved in the total educational agenda of Catholic schooling.

Perceiving the REC as a one-dimensional leader in Catholic schools in Australia is also a problem for other researchers. In works by McMahon et al (1997) and Duignan and d'Arbon (1998), and in the research of Flynn (1975, 1979, 1984, 1985) and Fahy (1992), the role of the REC as a leader in all the strands of leadership is rarely treated. Many scholarly articles written about leadership within the context of a Catholic school are still restricted to the role of Principal. However, all the CEO documentation in every diocese in Australia expresses the key leadership role of the REC. There are dangers that until schools and researchers bridge the conceptual gap, RECs will continue to be perceived as being outside the main leadership structures in schools.

<u>Brandon (1984)</u>

There is a body of research in which the primary focus is issues other than the role of the REC, but as part of that work, material on the role of the REC has emerged. Brandon (1984), at the time a Principal of a Catholic secondary school, explored the factors affecting implementation of *Guidelines* in a sample of Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. His research involved ten secondary schools and the manner in which the 1984 *Guideline*s had been implemented. In general, he found that:

> The leadership of both Principals and Religious Education co-ordinators is crucial in the Guidelines implementation process, the leadership being in both the level of direct involvement with the teaching of Religious Education and in the curriculum development aspect (Brandon, 1984, p. viii).

The relationship between the CEOM and Catholic schools was very important in this process. Catholic secondary schools, which were once conducted by religious orders and in many case owned by the order concerned, were now almost completely in the hands of lay staff. Consequently there was a need for support from the central authority in the development and sustaining of the religious education curriculum as contained in the *Guidelines*.

Brandon reached a number of conclusions about the REC's role in terms of ability to successfully implement the *Guidelines*. The religious education teachers who were surveyed as part of his research indicated that they saw the role of the REC as vitally important. Teachers indicated that they considered this position both very demanding and very necessary. While they showed that they believed the RECs were providing good leadership, religious education teachers also listed as a major implementation difficulty the lack of sufficient quality coordination in the subject, thus indicating their need for further and perhaps better support from RECs. The quality of leadership by the REC was a key factor in the effective implementation of the *Guidelines*. Within the school administrative and leadership structure, however, this importance was not as obvious:

> All Principals claimed that the status accorded the Religious education coordinator was at least halfway along the continuum from that of other classroom teachers towards that of a deputy principal (Brandon, 1984, p110).

This prompted Brandon to make explicit the difference between the real status of the role and the theoretical status:

> The status of the REC is theoretically quite considerable. This is not matched in every school by a corresponding time allowance for the satisfactory completion of his or her duties (Brandon, 1984, p. 137).

Brandon proposed a range of measures to support the REC. First, this had to come directly from the Principal, who was to ensure suitable status and financial allowance for the position. In addition there was the need to allocate sufficient time to the position so that the role could be undertaken. A most important help for the REC would be the encouragement and facilitation of school-based in-service for religious education teachers, as well as special in-service for the REC. For the REC this could mean a study of general teaching technique, religious education issues and curriculum theory development.

5.4 Empirical research into religious education teachers

More research has been undertaken on religious education teachers than into RECs. The findings of this research on religious education teachers are another critical component in the development of an understanding of the role of the REC. One of the major tasks of the REC is to work with religious education teachers in the development and implementation of the religious education curriculum and in the provision of support for religious education teachers. Therefore, research on religious education teachers is relevant to an understanding of the total role of the REC.

Malone (1982)

In 1977 Patricia Malone joined the CEO Melbourne, worked as a religious education advisor to schools and was involved in the development and implementation of a number of editions of the *Guidelines*. Her research (1982) focused on the development of the 1977-78 *Guidelines* in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. A central element of this research included an analysis of religious

education teachers and the religious education curriculum as well as elements in the historical development of the role of the REC.

The research by Malone indicates that in 1973 Rogan, a senior member of the planning team from the CEOM, sent a questionnaire to all teachers of religious education in Catholic schools. Rogan claimed, "undoubtedly the greatest problem facing secondary schools is the area of religious education" (Rogan, 1973, p. 1), and the survey was a means of gathering data as the initial step in responding to this problem. The results of the survey in relation to religious education teachers is contained in the following figure:

Figure 5.9 Results from 1973 survey of religious education teachers

The relative inexperience of many of the lay teachers involved in religious education

Variation of time given to religious education in the schools

Call to have specific syllabus or guidelines

Call for help with in-servicing of religious education teachers

Major area for help was in the role of the REC

Lack of training in religious education by over 60% of religious education teachers

These results reflect that, at this point, lay religious education teachers lacked experience and were seeking clear directions and guidance from the CEOM in regard to the nature and method of religious education. This period of history incorporates the dramatic decrease in the number of vowed women and men religious who had traditionally been the backbone of the Catholic school system for much of the twentieth century. Significant regarding this thesis is the fact that there was recognition that the role of the REC required help. Although the survey did not contain a separate section on RECs and did not specifically seek information on the RECs, it did gather some valuable data, summarised in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10 Situation with RECs in 1973

Thirty-nine of seventy-eight coordinators were Principals

Four were lay people

Uncertainty about the role

Insufficient time for meetings of religious education team

Need help to coordinate school program

Asked CEO to direct Principals to appoint REC and give time to the role

These results indicate that, at this stage, the role of the REC was largely in the hands of vowed religious and that only four RECs were lay people. In addition, the role was often attached to the role of Principal. There was great uncertainty and need for help in the role.

Malone showed that the response to these requests for help from the CEOM was quick and targeted. She quoted a letter from the newly appointed Director of Catholic Education, Fr T. M. Doyle:

> The Co-ordinator of RE has a key role in the organisation of the secondary school. In the 1973 July survey many co-ordinators requested some formal training in order to fulfil their role adequately. It is seen to be imperative also that some assistance be given to persons appointed to their task. In response to this the RE Department is arranging that nine 3-hour sessions for such training will be provided on the Monday mornings of first term in 1974 (Malone, 1982, p. 105).

Malone argued that at these meetings the RECs were presented with a "theoretical framework for religious education from both a theoretical and educational point of view" (Malone, 1982, p. 105).

> One of the factors at this early stage of development of the role of the RECs (1973) was the high turnover rate. This high turnover of coordinators was to pose a constant problem in terms of the development of the team in the Archdiocese, and also in the provision of in-service which could assume that it was building on previous work (Malone, 1982, p. 113). Malone explored the role of the REC in the development of

the 1977/1978 *Guidelines,* and found that many RECs were inexperienced and could not understand the theoretical underpinnings of the language of religious education that was present in them.

Malone (1990)

In later major research, Malone analysed teachers' approaches to the planning of religious education by studying a group of teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Sydney. Malone highlighted that:

> There was often a great deal of difference between the language of the written statements about the place and purpose of RE in the schools and the language of school practice and of the teachers themselves (Malone, 1990, p. 269).

She also pointed out that the role of the religious education teacher (and by extension the role of the REC) was made very difficult because "many of the schools do not have a systematic, coherent, coordinated RE program" (Malone, 1990, p. 270). In a reference to the *Guidelines* she claims that they had "a coherent model but most teachers went to the learning approaches and ignored the theoretical model" (Malone, 1990, p. 289). Furthermore, her investigation into the work of religious education teachers in Sydney and what they used as classroom material revealed that they had not used the centrally prepared *Guidelines*. Added to this, Malone showed that "approximately a third of all the secondary teachers of RE do not have qualifications in RE" (Malone, 1990, p. 295)

Malone's research shows that many of the religious education teachers in Catholic secondary schools do not fully understand the theoretical dimensions of their discipline and are not professionally qualified for the role. One of the major implications of this is the responsibility that it places on the RECs in the carrying out of their role.

Welbourne (1995)

Welbourne (1995), an Australian religious education lecturer at Australian Catholic University, conducted her research on developing critical

religious educators, and the role of graduate studies in the professional development of religious education teachers. She concluded that:

> There is a relationship between the technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge that the participants gained from pursing recognised formal qualifications and their autonomy and freedom to be effective critical religious educators (Welbourne, 1995, p. 303).

Welbourne argued for the importance of these formal qualifications for the development of this knowledge for religious education. These opportunities were not always available:

> Until courses for graduate diploma in religious education became part of the profiles in tertiary education in Australia, about 10 years ago, most teachers relied on their knowledge of the subject from their own school days or, at best, on some units in religious education in their pre-service qualification (Welbourne, 1995, p. 135).

Engebretson (1995)

Engebretson (1995) undertook research into the necessary elements in the preparation of the religion teacher. She interviewed RECs in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria to ascertain those elements that they perceived as necessary elements. She argued, "that any teacher entering the teaching profession must be well versed in the theory of the subjects he or she will teach" (Engebretson, 1995, p. 36) and that this also applied to religious education teachers. However, it was necessary to clearly understand what role the religious education teacher has within the classroom:

> The teacher is in the classroom as a teacher and not as a minister of the Church. The role of the teacher is to lead students in an educational inquiry into religion, fostering knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Catholic tradition and of other traditions (Engebretson, 1995, p. 63).

On the other hand, Engebretson adds:

> A range of religious commitments is presented in a positive way. The teacher is one who is vitally interested in all aspects of religions, and has a broad and deep knowledge of traditions. He or she is enthusiastic about the possibilities of

religious faith in the lives of young people. Ideally, religious commitment is modelled by the teacher who is able to allow, encourage and challenge students in their discussion of personal faith issues if this occurs naturally in the classroom (Engebretson, 1995, p. 71).

Engebretson concluded that the four areas of "subject theory, subject knowledge, professional skills and school support are very significant issues in the preparation of teachers for RE in Victorian Catholic secondary schools" (Engebretson, 1995, p. 304).

The work of Engebretson along with that of Malone and Welbourne have focused on what is required to be a religious education teacher. The work of Rymarz (1997a, 1997b) on teacher knowledge in religious education sums up:

What needs to be stressed here is that an RE teacher needs a high level of academic training and preparation if they are going to be able to introduce students to great Christian cultural values. This notion of the importance of a broad and comprehensive education for teachers is an issue which is receiving comment in the wider educational literature. The good teacher is required to make significant translation and representation of content in their subject area so that students can relate and understand the issues at stake. To do this properly requires breadth of learning on the teacher's part (Rymarz, 1997b, p. 15).

He concluded that for RE teachers this need is even more acute when we consider their role as cultural educators. Their role implies an expertise in a variety of subject disciplines, each of which has an important perspective on the culture of our society.

5.5 Conclusion

Research into the role of the REC occurred in a variety of dioceses around Australia, and also in both primary and secondary schools. The findings of this research, as well as research into religious education, were similar. Key among the findings was the concern about the rate of turnover of individuals in the role. The three major factors that researchers found contributed to the turnover were: the size of the role; the low status of the role; poor quality religious education teachers. These factors build on the findings from the analysis of the quantitative data in Chapter Four. Together these findings provide an understanding of the role of the REC that

forms the basis of the investigation that has been undertaken in the empirical component of this research in the following chapters.

Chapter Six

Methodology and research design

6.1 Introduction

Theoretical perspectives on religious education were explored in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis in order to provide a framework within which the role of the REC could be interpreted. In Chapters Four and Five, research into the role of the REC and documentation from CEOs about RECs were analysed in order to reach an understanding of the role as it has functioned within Catholic secondary schools. The empirical part of the thesis aims to analyse the role of the REC, as people in the role perceive it, and to examine the connection of these perceptions with the theoretical underpinnings of religious education.

In particular this chapter establishes the framework of the empirical research component of the thesis In-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method of data collection as they provided the means by which the RECs could converse about their role, thereby satisfying one of the main aims of the research, namely, the construction of theory about the role from the point of view of the person in the role. The data was analysed using inductive as opposed to deductive methods. This choice was dictated by the aim of the research, which was to establish what theories of religious education coordination emerged from those interviewed. Primarily the research reports on what RECs say about their role and how they speak about their conceptualisation of the role.

6.2 A philosophy of social research

The concern of this thesis is to ascertain the perceptions that RECs have about their role, which leads in turn to a development of theoretical perspectives on that role. Social research was chosen as the theoretical paradigm for the empirical research of this thesis for reasons that will be outlined in this chapter. The specific field of investigation is the REC in Catholic secondary schools within the Archdiocese of Melbourne. This chapter undertakes research within a particular philosophy and methodology of social research. Literature on social research indicates that all research has a number of constitutive elements: methods,

methodology and theoretical perspective. Methods are the techniques used to collect data and then analyse that data in relation to the research question (Crotty, 1998b, p. 3) with the purpose of making the results of the research public (Denzin, 1989, p. 4). Methodology is the prior design choice (Crotty, 1998b, p. 3) that determines the particular methods and the "principal ways in which the sociologist acts on their environment" (Denzin, 1989, p. 4). The theoretical perspective, which includes epistemological assumptions, is the "philosophical stance informing the methodology" (Crotty, 1998b, p. 3).

The research undertaken in this thesis is situated within the theoretical boundaries of a naturalistic inquiry and phenomenological paradigm. It uses qualitative methodologies and employs the data collection method of in-depth interviews. It is naturalistic in that the researcher:

> …does not attempt to manipulate the research setting. The research setting is a naturally occurring event, program, community, relationship, or interaction that has no predetermined course established by and for the researcher (Patton, 1990, pp. 39-40).

The implication of working within a naturalistic paradigm is that "the investigator typically does not work with either *a priori* theory or variables; these are expected to emerge from the inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203). Connected to this naturalistic stance is the philosophical position of phenomenology which "views human behavior – what people say and do – as a product of how people interpret their world" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13).

Research methodologies have implied understandings about the nature of reality (Williams & May, 1996, p. 69). Views on reality rest upon the epistemological and ontological perspectives that are subscribed to by the researcher and are evidenced in the philosophical points of view implied in the methodology. There are many such views on reality, but they are generally classified into two broad groups: there are constructionists who claim that the world is a "creation of the mind" (Williams & May, 1996, p. 70) and there are positivists who claim that the world "consists of 'real' things" (Williams & May, 1996, p. 70). This raises the crucial issue of what can be claimed by researchers in their findings to be 'real' and what can be 'known' about the 'social world' that is being researched. This thesis

aims to describe and analyse the 'real' and 'known' world of the REC from the point of view of the REC by adopting a constructionist paradigm.

The multi-dimensional world of the REC within which RECs exercise their various roles is not a physical world, but a socially constructed world, a "world that is interpreted or experienced" (Bowers, 1989, p. 38) by the RECs and told in their own words. There is no concrete reality that can contain the world and the many things that RECs do as part of their role in that world. Reality is constructed, changed and interpreted through the experiences of being an REC. Reality and meaning is therefore socially constructed by the RECs themselves. The world of the REC exists only as it is constructed and reproduced in the many activities of being RECs.

That social realities are socially constructed is something of a truism. The most ardent positivist would find that hard to contradict. What distinguishes constructionism, setting it over against the objectivism inherent in the positivist stance, is the understanding that all meaningful reality is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998b, p. 50).

In her extensive empirical research into the role of nurses in the USA, Bowers claimed that "the meaning of nurse, what a nurse is, is derived from how others act towards nurses… In fact, the term 'nurse' is a fundamentally different object in each of these scenarios" (Bowers, 1989, pp. 38-39). When these conclusions are transferred to RECs, the meaning of an REC is determined by how others act towards them, how they are perceived by the Church and the local CEOs, and how they are seen by other RECs and by teachers with whom they work. It is these varied perceptions that emerge from the interviews with the RECs.

Symbolic interactionists advocate a particular theory in relation to reality and the social world. Their focus is on individuals rather than broad social structures (Bowers 1989; Walker & Loughland 1998). They are interested in the everyday life and activities of people and how these help people construct and interpret their social world. Symbolic interactionists are interested in the way meaning is constructed. They research individuals and small groups to find out why they choose particular actions. The aim is to discover patterns of action. The point is that all action is meaningful and meanings direct action (Walker & Loughland, 1998, p. 10).

Symbolic interactionism claims that people are in a constant "process of interpretation and definition as they move from one situation to another" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 14). What people do evolves from how they perceive their social world:

> From the symbolic interactionist perspective, all social organizations consist of actors who develop definitions of a situation, or perspectives, through the process of interpretation and who then act in terms of those definitions. While people may act within the framework of an organization, it is the interpretation and not the organization that determines action (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 15).

According to Denzin (1989), the theory of symbolic interactionism rests on three basic assumptions. Firstly, what we know as social reality as it is "sensed, known, and understood is a social production" (Denzin, 1989, p. 5). Secondly, human beings are capable of "engaging in 'minded' self reflective behavior" Thirdly "humans interact with one another" and "interaction is symbolic because it involves the manipulation of symbols, words, meanings and languages" (Denzin, 1989, p. 5).

One of the criticisms of the theory of the construction of reality is that "if everything is just in the mind, then how can we distinguish the true from the false?" (Williams & May, 1996, p. 72), and therefore, how can common understandings be reached on the data gathered in research? Symbolic interactionism contends that common understandings can be reached. Symbolic interactionism asks "what common set of symbols and understandings have emerged to give meaning to people's interactions?" (Patton, 1990, p. 75). In fact, people create shared meanings, which become their shared interpretation of reality and the shared perspective on their known world:

> It is a perspective that places great emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretation as essential human processes in reaction against behaviourism and mechanical stimulus-response psychology. People create shared meanings through their interactions and those meanings become their reality (Patton, 1990, p. 75).

The empirical research in this thesis used the insights from a naturalistic philosophy of social research, in particular those gained through symbolic

interactionism, in order to ascertain a common understanding of the world of the REC. While an extensive survey instrument would have enabled the researcher to gather a large amount of data, this would not have been the type of data that would have added significantly to the extensive analysis contained in this thesis. In-depth interviews of RECs were required if the aims of the thesis were to be achieved. The shared meanings of the role of the RECs that emerged in the dialogue and mutual exploration in the interviews were analysed in order to deconstruct understandings of that role as it emerged. In this way, the empirical research conducted for this thesis provided evidence towards the realisation of the aims of the thesis.

6.3 Qualitative and quantitative research methodology

Research literature has long debated the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative methods (Crotty 1998b; Bouma 2000; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). On the one hand, some argue that quantitative research "uses experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypothetical generalizations" while phenomenological inquiry and qualitative research use "a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings" and that these two approaches represent a "fundamentally different inquiry paradigm" (Hoepfl, 1997)[7]. On the other hand, Patton argues that "they constitute alternate, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be collected in the same study" (Patton, 1990, p. 14).

Other researchers such as (Caws 1989) claim that to describe these methodologies as distinct is not accurate because "Qualitative and quantitative do not divide up a territory" but both are "overlapping almost totally" (Caws, 1989, p. 26). However, "one is basic and the other optional. Everything in our world is qualitative; but virtually everything is capable – given suitable ingenuity on our part – of generating quantitative determinations" (Caws, 1989, p. 26). This view is supported by Eisner, who argues "the term 'qualitative' suggests its opposite 'quantitative' and implies that qualitative inquiry makes no use of quantification. This is not the case" (Eisner, 1998, p. 25). Finally Van Mannen argues:

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[7] Available http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/hoepfl.html [Downloaded May 2002]

The label qualitative method has no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (Van Mannen, 1983, p. 9).

The major design thrust of this thesis was qualitative. In Chapter Four, however, important quantitative data on RECs that had been collected by the CEOM was analysed. Analysis of that data relating to qualifications, years of experience, turnover of personnel in the role, time release for the role, and membership of school administrative and leadership teams had been undertaken prior to the interview stage of the research. This quantitative data provided the researcher with considerable background information that helped construct the framework of the qualitative component of the research. Rather than these forms of data being opposites, they combined to construct a holistic understanding of the role of the REC.

Qualitative researchers claim that qualitative research achieves certain outcomes, in particular the possibility "to study selected issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 1990, p. 13). Patton adds that in contrast to quantitative approaches "qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 14). Unlike quantitative methods, where surveys or questionnaires are the method, Patton argues that "in qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument. Validation in qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork" (Patton, 1990, p. 14). Furthermore, Van Mannen (1983) claims that qualitative research aims to describe "the unfolding of social processes rather than the social structures that are often the focus of quantitative researchers" (Van Mannen, 1983, p. 10). This is achieved because qualitative research "aims to develop personal understandings and research accounts that are sensitive to the context and subjective worlds of those involved" (Allen, 1998, p. 24). In this thesis qualitative research was chosen so that a detailed exploration of the role of the REC could be undertaken in a manner that took into account the subjective world of the REC.

6.4 Aspects of qualitative research

At a basic level qualitative methodologies "produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" that enable the researcher "to know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world" (Bogdan & Taylor 1975, p. 4). This necessarily requires that the researcher be "involved in the lives of the subjects" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 9).

Bogdan and Taylor also argue that there is a degree of detachment of the researcher from the subject in order to be able to:

> …to stand back from subjects' perspectives. They are viewed as neither true nor false, good nor bad. The researcher seeks not truth nor morality but rather understanding. While in the situation, the researcher suspends his or her own beliefs and predispositions, as well as those of his or her subjects (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 9).

Qualitative research is described by Bouma as allowing for "more continuous reflection on the research in progress, more interaction with the participants in the research, as there is generally more room for ongoing alteration as the research continues" (Bouma, 1996, p. 174). Finally, Marshall and Rossman propose that in a generalist sense all qualitative research can be placed within four broad purposes of study in the qualitative area: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and predictive (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 78). The purposes of this present thesis are inclusive of these four elements as is indicated in the following chapters.

6.5 Interview methods in social research

Among the methods used by qualitative researchers are observation, analysing texts and documents, interviewing, recording and transcribing (Silverman, 1993, pp. 8-9). The qualitative research undertaken in this thesis incorporates all of these factors with the exception of 'observation'. Observation of RECs in their place of work was considered as a means of collecting data, but it was ultimately rejected by the researcher because the aims of the research were to gain data from the RECs about how they conceptualised their role rather than to collect data on how they performed their role. Critical to this thesis was the acquiring of verbal data from

RECs about their understanding of their role and of their 'world'. It is an important emphasis in this research that attention is given to what RECs say about their role, and how it is described and then analysed. Such an emphasis is based on the notion that people themselves, in this case RECS, are a source of valuable and direct knowledge of their own world. RECs are the most reliable interpreters of their own world. Consequently, a decision was made that interviews were the best method to obtain the required data.

6.6 Forms of interviews

Literature on the types or forms of interviewing is considerable and contains a myriad of classifications. Researchers such as Denzin (1989, pp. 104-108) have three classifications of interviews. The "schedule-standardised" interview involves the uniform wording and ordering of questions, so that every participant hears the same question in the same order. This model also allows for a piloting and pre-testing of questions in order to obtain the final schedule. The second form is the "non-scheduled standardised", or "unstructured", interview where a sequence of questions is not required. Such a strategy assumes that no predetermined sequence is suitable for every respondent and their context. The third form is the "non-standardised" interview where there are no preset questions. There is no attempt to standardised the various components of the interview. On the other hand, Patton (1990, p. 289) uses the language *standardised*, *general interview guide* and *informal conversational* to classify interviews. It was suggested by Burgess that if interviews were set out on a continuum then you would have "structured interviews at one end and unstructured at the other" (Burgess, 1982, p. 107).

Within these varieties of interview forms, Kvale points out that there are particular intentions and purposes in the research interview that are "based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5). Kvale, along with others (Denzin 1989; Patton 1990), challenges the claim that in this form of interview there is no structure: "An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose… The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 7). This argument has been a long-held view of Palmer (1928) and supported throughout the twentieth century:

The unstructured interview may, therefore, appear to be without a structure, but nevertheless the researcher has to establish a framework within which the interview can be conducted; the unstructured interview is flexible, but it is also controlled. Palmer suggested that the researcher must keep the informant[8] relating experiences and attitudes that are relevant to the research problem and encourage the informant to discuss these experiences naturally and freely (Burgess, 1982, p. 107)

Within these broad classifications of the types of qualitative interview, there are also descriptions of the manner of the interview. A variety of expressions are used to describe this, from "intense interviewing" (Brenner et al, 1985, p. 149) and "exploratory" or "depth" interviews (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 67) to the most common expression, "in-depth interviews" (Marshall & Rossman 1989; Minichello et al 1995; Bouma 1996). The common elements in the descriptions are the intensity, flexibility and interactive conversational mode of the interview. Bouma argues:

The in-depth interview provides the greatest opportunity to find out what someone thinks or feels, and how they react to various issues and situations. The in-depth interview usually takes an hour or longer and is usually guided by an interview schedule that lists key questions to be asked, or topics to be covered, in the interview (Bouma, 1996, p. 178).

By way of summary, there are four aspects, according to Minichiello et al (1995, p. 68), to in-depth interviews. First, a greater length of time is spent with the informant than in other interviews. Secondly, the encounter is between the researcher and informant. Thirdly, it is the account of the informant that is being sought and is highly valued. Fourthly, the aim is to retrieve the informant's world by understanding their perspective. The hallmark of in-depth interviews:

…. is learning about what is important in the minds of the informants: *their* meanings, perspectives, and definitions; how *they* view, categorize, and experience the world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 88).

This research design used in-depth interviews to explore the world of the REC. Interviews conducted for this thesis were 60-90 minutes in length in order for issues to be explored in an in-depth mode. The researcher proceeded on the assumption that

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[8] 'Informant' is one title given to people who are interviewed for research purposes. Other common titles are 'subjects','interviewees' and 'participants'.

what was central to this thesis was the informants' view of reality and how they saw their world of work as RECs (Minichiello et al, 1995).

6.7 The interview process

In the interview process the "interviewer and interviewee actively *construct* some version of the world appropriate to what we take to be self-evident about the person to whom we are speaking and the context of the question" (Silverman, 1993, p. 90). Interviews can be used by all manner of researchers for a variety of purposes. Positivists claim that:

> …interview data give us access to facts about the world; the primary issue is to generate data which are valid and reliable, independently of the research setting; the main ways to achieve this are the random selection of the interview sample and the administration of the standardised questions with multiple-choice answers which can be readily tabulated (Silverman, 1993, p. 90).

On the other hand, interactionists claim that:

> …interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds; the primary issue is to generate data which give an authentic insight into people's experiences; the main ways to achieve this are unstructured, open-ended interviews usually based upon prior, in-depth participant observation (Silverman, 1993, p. 91).

From the perspective of the interactionists, the researcher listens to what informants say about their world and their lived experience, all of which is expressed in their own words. This is because the "qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). In this type of interview, there is less dependence on question and answer procedures as the interviews are "more like conversations" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 82) that are "a give-and-take between two persons" (Denzin, 1989, p. 102), where "the outcome is a co-production of the interviewer and the subject" (Kvale, 1996, p. xvii). The purpose of such an interview is to incorporate the everyday elements of life (Burgess, 1982, p. 107). However, it is argued by some (Oppenheim 1992) that the interview is not "an ordinary conversation" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 65). Interviews are essentially a "one-way process" (Oppenheim, 1992, p.

66) where the interviewer asks and directs the conversation. In fact, Oppenheim argues, if it was to become a two-way process "it would lose much of its value" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 66). In the opinion of Bowers, however, "Optimally, the researcher should be able to maintain one foot in the world of the subjects and one foot outside that world" (Bowers, 1989, p. 43), so that the researcher can "view the subject's world from the inside while maintaining the distance necessary to raise analytical questions" (Bowers, 1989, p. 44).

Qualitative research interviews are also social events (Silverman, 1993, p. 92) that emerge from the mutuality of exchange within the interview. In-depth interviews are "flexible and dynamic" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77) in their design and are:

> …modelled after a conversation between equals, rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. Far from being a robot like data collector, the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool. The role entails not merely obtaining answers, but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77).

One of the advantages of this flexibility and general approach to in-depth interviews is that it gives the participant informant the freedom and invitation to add and extend to what was intended by the interviewer (Whyte, 1982, p. 111), particularly if open-ended questions are used (Jones, 1985a, p. 48). Central to the in-depth interview is the flexibility in procedure that can help overcome, but not remove, the possibility of the interview being a one-way process.

The central value of the interview as a research procedure is that it allows both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved. There is an implicit or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation that is not so central, and often not present, in other research procedures (Brenner et al, 1985, p. 3).

An objection to this method of research interview is that it may not uncover the truth. However, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) respond to such criticism by arguing that truth in qualitative research is complicated. Is it 'truth' that the researcher is seeking from the informants, or is it their perspectives and how they actually view the world that is being sought? Truth, they claim, is not some static,

objective view but a composite of what people think about their world and each other.

In an attempt to describe the process of an interactive in-depth interview, Kvale (1996, pp. 3-4) uses a metaphor of a miner and a traveller. The miner tries to dig underground to find a treasure that is waiting to be found. It is a search for something already substantially known, something that already exists, a reality that simply needs to be discovered. On the other hand, for the traveller it is a searcher not for what is known, but for what may "lead to new knowledge" where "the traveler might change as well" (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). In essence, the interview is an artefact that is brought to life in the process of the interview; it is there for that moment and can never be exactly replicated (Jones, 1985, p. 48). Such a metaphor has a particular relevance and appeal for this research project since is allows the background and experience of the researcher to also become a dynamic in the process.

6.8 The purpose of the interviews

The general purpose of interviews is to find out what is in the mind of the participant informant, "to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). The primary purpose of the interview is "eliciting information" (Black & Champion, 1976, p. 354), and to "obtain valid information" (Brenner et al, 1985, p. 150). Interviews produce a specific type of data that is different to other kinds of data. Interviews explore the social reality of the informant and are "essentially heuristic" in order "to develop ideas and research hypotheses rather than to gather facts and statistics" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 67). The ideas raised in the interview are the result of the interchange of views of the interviewer and the participant informant. Thus "interviewing means quite literally to develop a *view* of something between (*inter*) people" (Brenner et a1, 1985, p. 148). The actual data, according to Kvale, "is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted" (Kvale, 1996, p. 11). Data then is not just what is said, but what it means, and how it will be interpreted. It is different data from that obtained through surveys and questionnaires because:

> …one enters into a dialogue with another person and is then carried further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue, and it elicits statements and

counterstatements and in the end plays these into each other (Kvale 1996, p. 21).

6.9 Possible limitations of the interview approach

There are a number issues that arise concerning the possible weaknesses and deficiencies of conducting interviews. The role of the interviewer in any interview is critical (Patton, 1990). In fact the interviewer becomes the research instrument and the data depends to a large extent on the degree of skill of the interviewer. Even though the interview is conversational and flexible, it is the interviewer who normally asks and directs the questions and chooses to move on to other questions or decides to explore issues in depth. The interviewer is continually in the process of making choices (Jones, 1985a, p. 47). Decisions are made relating to the responses from the informants in order to "obtain detail, verify statements, elucidate contradictory data and obtain information that will allow them to evaluate the participant informants' responses" (Burgess, 1982, p. 108). However, it is important to keep in mind that although the role of the interviewer is critical, and determines to a large degree the nature of the interview, the interviewer is one who "leads the subject towards certain themes but not to certain opinions about these themes" (Kvale, 1996, p. 34). It is the interviewer who leads a discussion between two people "about a theme that is of interest to both" (Kvale, 1996, p. 28). The type of questions are also important and in the qualitative research interview the interviewer "seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level" ause the" question of why the subjects experience and act as they do is primarily a task for the researcher to evaluate" (Kvale, 1996, p. 32).

In a similar vein, Denzin provides a timely warning for researchers, that interviews:

> …should not be the occasion for one person to do all the talking, while the other only asks questions and listens. When interviews take this form, they become authoritarian exchanges in which the power and prestige of the social science shape the information that is given (Denzin, 1989, p. 103).

Care was taken in the interviews to stop this happening. The types of questions asked, the comments made in response to the interviewee, and the body language of the researcher during the interview are all important in influencing what data may

emerge. The interviewer must work as much as possible towards the removal of an authoritarian tone so that the information that is forthcoming is shaped as little by the atmosphere as possible. Furthermore, "some argue that the qualitative researcher, being the sole instrument, acts like a sieve which selectively collects and analyzes non-representative data" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 12). Finally, in regard to the role of the interviewer in the interview, "some critics charge that qualitative researchers elicit unrepresentative data by virtue of their presence among objects" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 12). To keep a balance between the positive and negative possibilities of the research interview is important, particularly realising that "whatever the problems faced by the qualitative researcher, they are faced by other researchers as well" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13).

To address some of these possible limitations, a number of strategies were employed. Once ethical approval for the research had been obtained from the relevant authorities, a letter outlining the purpose and processes of the research was sent to each of those being interviewed (Appendices 15-17).

After the letter was sent the researcher phoned the participants in order to arrange a time for the interview that was suitable for them. Great care was taken to arrange a time and setting within their work place where they would feel relaxed and where the pressure of the ordinary duties of school life would not interfere with the interview. It was stressed that the researcher did not want them to 'squeeze in' an interview in the middle of a hectic schedule and feel that they were not able to devote the necessary seriousness to the task. In addition, the phone call to the participants provided the opportunity for the researcher to reinforce the purpose and process of the interview, and to answer any questions that they may have had so that during the interview itself time would not be spent clarifying these matters.

Furthermore, an interview guide was prepared by the researcher in consultation with a reference group of four RECs who were not going to be interviewed. The reference group was informed of the purposes of the research and was asked to frame broad questions that could be used in the interview. The questions were then grouped under the following headings: individuals in the role, status, nature of role, models of religious education, relationship with the Principal, relationship with CEOM.

Each interview commenced with a question asking the participants why they had become a REC. The process then involved a discussion of the issues that arose from their first response. In practice, the interview guide that had been developed by the reference group was rarely consulted in the conducting of the interviews. However, the preparation of the guide provided the researcher with a range of possible directions that could be called upon, and helped conceptualise issues before the interviews took place.

6.10. Issues in the collection of interview data

Issues relating to the type of data that is collected during the interview also need clarification. One of the easiest ways to collect a large amount of data in interviews is by tape recording. When interviews are taped and then translated the spoken data as represented by words on a page then becomes the raw data for analysis (Patton 1990; Silverman 1993). Verbal data is different from other data (Minichiello et al 1995), such as documents or video-tape (where body language and facial expressions become part of the data as well). It is claimed by Scheurich that once the texts are transcribed and removed from their original setting, they can become decontextualised when analysed by coding and categorisation (Scheurich, 1997, p. 63).

In this thesis each interview was taped using a very small, unobtrusive microphone that was highly efficient and did not result in distortions or lack of clarity in the spoken word. At the commencement of each interview, the researcher completed a form that included details of the persons being interviewed and their experience (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Interview information sheet

YEARS TEACHING	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	17-20	21+

Taught in   Boys 7-10 Boys 7-12 Boys 11-12
Girls 7-10 Girls 7-12 Girls 11-12

Coed 7-10 Coed 7-12 Coed 11-12

CEO schools   Religious Order Schools

YEARS TEACHING RE	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	17-20	21+
YEARS BEING REC	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	17-20	21+

Other details:

More than one school _____
Currently Religious Education Coordinator _____
When were you a Religious Education Coordinator _____
1st as Religious Education Coordinator POL 1   POL 2   POL 3
Time component
2nd as Religious Education Coordinator POL 1   POL 2   POL 3
Time component
3rd as Religious Education Coordinator POL 1   POL 2   POL 3

Time component

Other roles   FDC   CEO   PRINC   TERT.

QUALS IN RE	GC	GD	MRE	BTHE	MTHE	PHD

In addition, the generalisations reached from the analysis of these texts, were of a sort which, in Scheurich terms "mostly represent the mind of the researcher" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 64). This problem of interpreting what is said in interviews is further compounded because interviews, as a form of conversation, are "subject to the same fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations and distortions that characterize talk between any persons" and there can be a "great discrepancy between what they say and what they actually do" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 81). Because interviews are embedded in a social context and situation that exists between the interviewer and the informant:

> …we can never assume that the accounts given are simply
> answers to questions; they are the joint product of the
> questions as perceived by the informants and the social
> circumstances within which the questions were put to them
> (Brenner et al, 1985, p. 151).

Furthermore, the quality of the interview is also determined by the willingness of the informant to share information with the interviewer, the questions that are asked or not asked, and by the ability of the interviewer to listen to the responses of the informant (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 83). It is a requirement of a successful interview that attention is paid to the informant. It is argued by Foddy (1993) that generally little attention is given to this:

> Neither survey researchers nor qualitative field researchers have paid much attention to how respondents take the role of the researcher when framing an answer nor have they paid much attention to the possibility that the respondents' perceptions of the researchers' purpose for asking a question will influence their answers. They have paid little attention to the possibility that respondents' perceptions of the way the researcher sees them will influence their answers. And they have almost totally ignored the possibility that the way the research situation is defined will influence the manner in which interactants interpret one another's acts (Foddy, 1993, pp. 20-21).

A number of suggestions have been made by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) to assist the interviewer with enabling the needs and feelings of the informant to be effectively handled. They range from finding a "private place where you can talk without interruption and where the informant will feel relaxed" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 88), and "getting people to start to talk about their perspectives and experiences without structuring the conversation and defining what they should say" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 89) to creating "an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable to talk freely about themselves" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 93). They conclude with five 'tips' for the interviewer: being non-judgemental; letting people talk; paying attention; being sensitive; probing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, pp. 94-96).

Issues of reliability and validity are important. Validation and reliability testing in quantitative research is what Silverman calls authenticity in qualitative research. He argues that "the aim is usually to gather an 'authentic' understanding of people's experience and it is believed that 'open-ended' questions are the most effective route towards this end" (Silverman, 1993, p. 10). In order to judge the effectiveness of qualitative research, Eisner (1991, pp. 53-58) postulates three features: coherence, consensus and instrumental utility:

Coherence: Does the story make sense? How have the conclusions been supported? To what extent have multiple data sources been used to give credence to the interpretation that has been made?

Consensus: The condition in which the readers of a work concur that the findings and/or interpretations reported by the investigator are consistent with their own experience or with the evidence presented.

Instrumental utility: The most important test of any qualitative study is its usefulness. A good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing.

6.11 Issues of sampling

As a general definition qualitative analysis is "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). Following the decision to use in-depth interviews as the data collection method and prior to the qualitative analysis, a decision was made on who would be interviewed.

Sampling is both a broad ranging term within social research (Honigmann, 1982, p. 78) and an essential component of it (Burgess, 1982, p. 75). It is impossible for research to cover every informant and selections need to be made (Burgess, 1982, p. 75). In general the purpose of sampling:

> …will most often be to include as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions; hence, maximum variation sampling will usually be the sampling mode of choice. The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. A second purpose is to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

There are different types of sampling from which the researcher can choose: statistical and theoretical (Burgess, 1982, p. 76), random and purposeful (Patton, 1990, pp. 182ff). Within these main types there are many possible alternatives (Patton, 1990, p. 182). Purposeful sampling "selects information-rich

cases for in-depth study" and the "size and specific cases depend upon study purposes" (Patton, 1990, p. 182). It is argued by Bickman and Rog (1998) that purposeful sampling has four important uses:

> A small sample that has been systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation….
>
> The conclusions adequately represent the entire range of variation, rather than only the typical members or some subject of this range….
>
> A sample can be purposefully selected to allow for the examination of cases that are critical for the theories this study began with, or that have subsequently been developed….
>
> To establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals…. (pp. 87-88).

The basic questions in sampling for Glaser and Strauss are "what groups or subgroups does one turn to next in the data collection? And for what theoretical purpose? In short, how does the sociologist select multiple comparison groups?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). They argue that "the researcher chooses any groups that will generate, to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible, and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). Furthermore, this sampling strategy can also be used with interviews:

> When using only interviews, for instance, a researcher surely can study comparison groups composed of respondents chosen in accordance with his emergent analytic framework. And historical documents, or other library materials, lend themselves wonderfully to the comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 53).

To reduce the excesses of subjectivity in the sampling of informants' responses, triangulation can be used. This can be achieved by interviewing "as many different subjects who are familiar with the topic or the event as we can" (Cole,

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1980, p. 101), or by using different techniques throughout the thesis to obtain different points of view (Allen, 1998, p. 24) and to validate or 'test' points of view that have already been expressed.

It was important for this thesis that the selected sample cover a broad cross-section of RECs, so random sampling was discarded as an option. Instead, a purposeful selected sample was chosen in order to canvass the views of a range of critical groups. RECs operate within all Catholic schools, so it was necessary that the RECs be selected from girls' schools, boys' schools and co-educational schools. In addition, it was necessary that the RECs also represent those schools whose structure was from Years 7-10 and others from Years 7-12. Furthermore, within the Archdiocese of Melbourne there are schools owned and governed by religious orders and schools owned and governed by the Archdiocese, so RECs were selected from both of these. In total twenty-three RECs were interviewed, and this number was sufficient to cover the sample. Figure 6.2 indicates the schools from which the RECs were drawn, but because a number of the RECs worked in more than one school, the total in some sections is above 23.

Figure 6.2 Type of schools from which RECs were drawn for interview

Number of RECs in boys' schools
> RECs in boys' schools Years 7-10 = 7
> RECs in boys' schools Years 7-12 = 9
> RECs in boys' schools Years 7-11 = 1

Number of RECs in girls' schools
> RECs in girls' schools Years 7-10 = 1
> RECs in girls' schools Years 7-12 = 11
> RECs in girls' schools Years 7-11 = 1

Number of RECs in co-educational schools
> RECs in co-educational schools Years 7-10 = 3
> RECs in co-educational schools Years 7-12 = 11
> RECs in co-educational schools Years 11-12 = 2

Number of RECs in schools according to ownership
> RECs in CEO schools = 3
> RECs in religious order schools = 7
> RECs who had been in both types = 13

As was shown from the quantitative data in Chapter Four, the range of experience of the RECs as teachers of religious education and as RECs varies considerably. To obtain a view of religious education coordination that is representative of all RECs, it was necessary to select RECs across this broad range. However, rather than have an equal balance across each of these variables, a deliberate decision was made to skew those interviewed to include a larger sample of people who were experienced as teachers, as religious education teachers and as RECs. It was assumed that the greater the experience of the REC, the better would be the understanding and conceptualisation of the role. As part of the decision-making processes, a determination had to be made about what constituted short-term, medium-term and long-term experience. As a result of industrial work place agreements in Catholic schools since 1990, it was determined that the contract time for a position of responsibility and leadership is two to three years. Consequently, a short-term role was considered to be an REC who has undertaken the role for one contract term (two to three years). Medium-term RECs were those who had undertaken the role for two contract terms (four to six years). A long-term role was considered to be an REC who had been in the role for more than two contract terms (seven years or more). As stated above, short-term, medium-term and long-term RECs were interviewed, but there was a deliberate weighting of long-term RECs:

Short-term RECs interviewed = 7
Medium-term RECs interviewed = 6
Long-term RECs interviewed = 10

The other aspects of experience relate to: the REC's length of experience as a general teacher; as a teacher of religious education; as REC across schools; and the numbers of schools in which they had been REC.

Figure 6.3 Experience of RECs that were interviewed

	Years teaching	Years teaching RE	Years as REC
1-3 yrs	0	1	7
4-6 yrs	3	2	6
7-9 yrs	1	1	5
10-12 yrs	2	3	1
13-16 yrs	2	5	3
17+ yrs	15	11	1

In relation to the experience of the RECs, of the twenty-three interviewed, fourteen had been in the role in one school, eight in two schools and one across three schools.

Another critical group are those RECs who went from that role in schools to join the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne in the Religious Education Department and had, as part of their duties, the ongoing professional development of RECs in Catholic secondary schools. Members of this group have a unique perspective on RECs across all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. In addition, part of the reason for their employment is that they have demonstrated outstanding skills in their schools and are able to assist in the ongoing development of RECs across all schools. As people with these skills and working with those at school level, they bring a different set of insights and perspective. Four of the twenty-three interviewed had worked in schools as RECs, then joined the CEO for a period of time and then returned to schools in the role of REC.

Of equal importance is the group of RECs who were appointed Principal, and indeed some who, while Principal, acted as REC. The Principal, as the person ultimately responsible for religious education in the school and for the employment and appointment of people to the role of REC, is able to provide insights which once again have a different dimension. Two of the twenty-three interviewed had been RECs and then became Principals, as well as serving as REC while in the Principal role.

Another important element in the purposeful selection of those interviewed was the range of specific religious education qualifications. The twenty-three interviewed covered the following range:

Figure 6.4 Qualifications of RECs who were interviewed

Basic education credential and CECV accreditation = 5

Graduate Diploma in Religious Education = 6

Bachelor of Theology = 3

Graduate Diploma in Religious Education and Bachelor of Theology = 3

Bachelor of Theology and Master of Religious Education = 1

Master of Religious Education and Master of Theology = 2

6.12 Data analysis

The literature on qualitative data analysis is vast and there is little uniformity in the language used to describe the range of processes involved. There are general descriptions presented by Ely et al (1991) who describe the task of analysing as finding "some way or ways to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data; to reduce and reorganize and combine so that the readers share the researcher's findings in the most economical, interesting fashion" (Ely et al, 1991, p. 140). According to Patton (1990), the challenge in qualitative analysis is to "reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 1990, pp. 371-372), and there are at least six steps or processes involved. The first is to describe the data (Patton, 1990, p. 374) and the second to keep the description of the data separate from the interpretation (Patton, 1990, p. 375). Next is the decision to analyse each section of the data or to proceed with cross analysis (Patton, 1990, p. 376). The fourth step "is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 381). Steps five and six involve the creative process of allowing the categories to emerge from the data and then to make judgements about them (Patton, 1990, p. 406). A method suggested by Ely et al (1991) in this final stage is to search for themes:

> A theme can be defined as statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that caries emotional or factual impact (Ely et al, 1991, p. 150).

Descriptions by Lincoln and Guba of a particular form of analysis, inductive analysis, describe it "simply as a process for 'making sense' of field data. The sources of such data may be interviews, observations, documents, unobtrusive measures, nonverbal cues, or any other qualitative or quantitative information pools" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). This is extended by Patton who claims that in inductive analysis "the researcher attempts to make sense of the situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the phenomena or setting under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 44). Inductive methodology is the companion of naturalistic inquiry, because the strategies employed:

> …allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be. The qualitative methodologist attempts to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying (Patton, 1990, p. 44).

One form of inductive analysis has been called "grounded theory". It has its origins in the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was later developed by Glaser (1978, 1992) and Strauss (1987). Since the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), there has been considerable acrimony between Glaser and Strauss concerning grounded theory. Much of this is at a technical level and does not impinge upon this thesis. In addition, the technical dimensions of the process as outlined in the original understanding of grounded theory have given way to a more generalised approach, where grounded theory is used interchangeably with inductive analysis. A basic understanding of grounded theory is "to designate theory and theory development which are grounded in empirical data as opposed to theory which is logically derived. It is a theory that has its beginnings in the empirical world" (Bowers, 1989, p. 43). Grounded theory, therefore, "depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are 'grounded' in the empirical world" (Patton, 1990 p. 67). This means that the researcher using grounded theory "becomes immersed in the world of the research subjects. The researcher attempts to discover what the world is like, how it is constructed and experienced" (Bowers, 1989, p. 43).

In this thesis, the analysis of data that has been produced by in-depth interviews with RECs emerges from the literature on inductive and general grounded theory. The starting point was a concern to understand the world of the RECs through what they said. The transcripts of the interviews were used in conjunction with the audio tape versions to make of sense of the data in the initial coding, which was then categorised and finally the themes emerged upon which theory was formulated. The important element of the process of the coding of the data was the mapping of the interviews. The task of mapping in order to code the material is more important than the mechanical procedure used to obtain the coding (Jones, 1985b, p. 63). The coding was undertaken on large sheets of paper. The analysis procedure

followed was that outlined in Jones (1985b), and as it related to this research it was undertaken in the following steps.

6.13 Steps in the coding of the interviews

Step 1 in the analysis process: initial coding

For each interview the tape was listened to while reading the transcript with the purpose of understanding the perspective of the REC. On sheets of paper were placed the key words as headings with the purpose of initially obtaining themes from each paragraph. For example, in the text there occurred such statements as these:

> So in broad terms the challenge that I saw was two things –
> the challenge of trying to get across a message to students,
> and also trying to get a little bit of message, and form some
> sort of foundational thing with teachers. To kind of point out
> to them that "you're not alone, let's share this journey that
> we're on" because, after all, my view is that most teachers
> should be a role model, some of them mightn't know it, but
> they are (Interview B).

Step 2 in the analysis process: gathering the themes

On the sheets of paper the researcher then mapped all elements that were scattered throughout the entire interview that were related to the theme – in this example, the theme of challenge. The key word would be placed in the centre of the page, and using the actual words of the text, links and strings would be added. For example Figure 6.5.

Figure 6. 5 Drawing from step two of the process
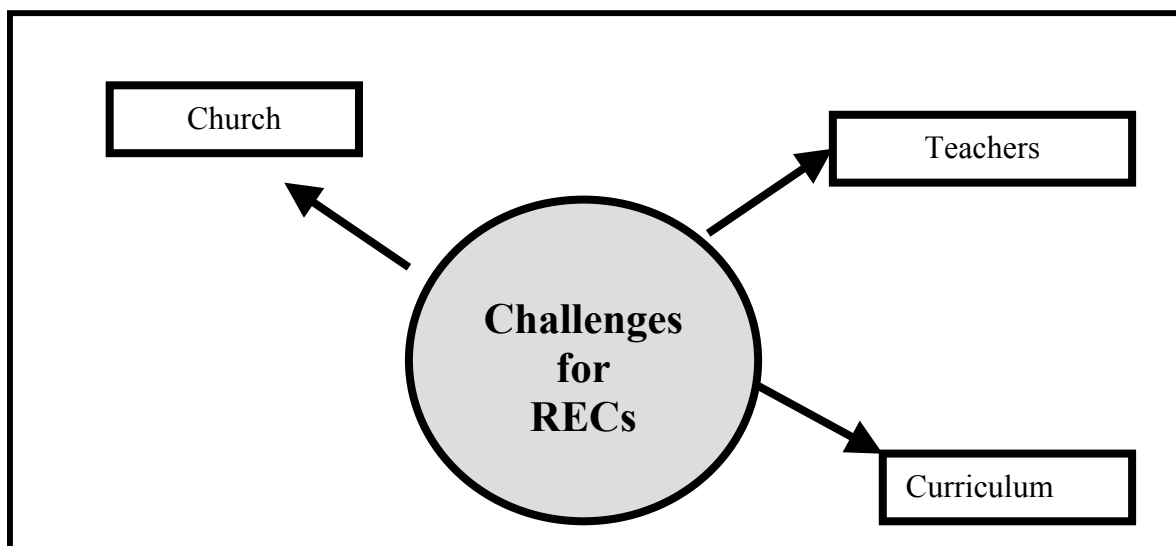
Eventually, for each theme that emerged in each interview, the mapping developed along the line indicated in the diagram in Figure 6.6 (p. 171). The major theme is in the middle in an oval (Challenges faced as RECs). It is linked to shaded boxes that represent the key characteristics or aspect of the theme (Changing Church, Teachers of RE, Need a team effort, Revision of curriculum). At all times the actual words and phrases of the interview were used in order to keep the perspective of the person interviewed.

Step 3 in the analysis process: comparing the interviews

Once the mapping was completed for each interview, the task was to search for common themes. This involved a critical search of the interview and use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to establish the major themes. Constant comparison involves checking the common themes for consistencies and differences across the range of interviews. Major categories emerged which then became the basis for the generating of theory. Once the major themes were determined, all the maps relating to those themes were put together on a large sheet of paper (Appendix 16), listing all the key characteristics in order to ascertain what the participants were saying about the role of the REC. The details of this analysis are presented in the following chapters of this thesis.

6.14 Conclusion

The empirical component of this thesis has as its foundation in qualitative research in the field of social science. It attempts to examine the world of the RECs for the purpose of obtaining their perspectives. The philosophical assumption of the methodological design is that meaning is a social construction. In order to enter into the world of the RECs and to understand their construction of the role, the research tool of in-depth interviewing was used. This limited the number of RECs who would be involved, but the decision was to have in-depth conversations with a few rather than use other methods. Analysis of the interviews used inductive principles in order for the theories and understandings of the role of the RECs to emerge from the data rather than superimposing existing theories. The description and analysis of the results of this research design are given in the following chapters.

Figure 6.6 Reproduction of part of a mapping analysis of one section of one interview
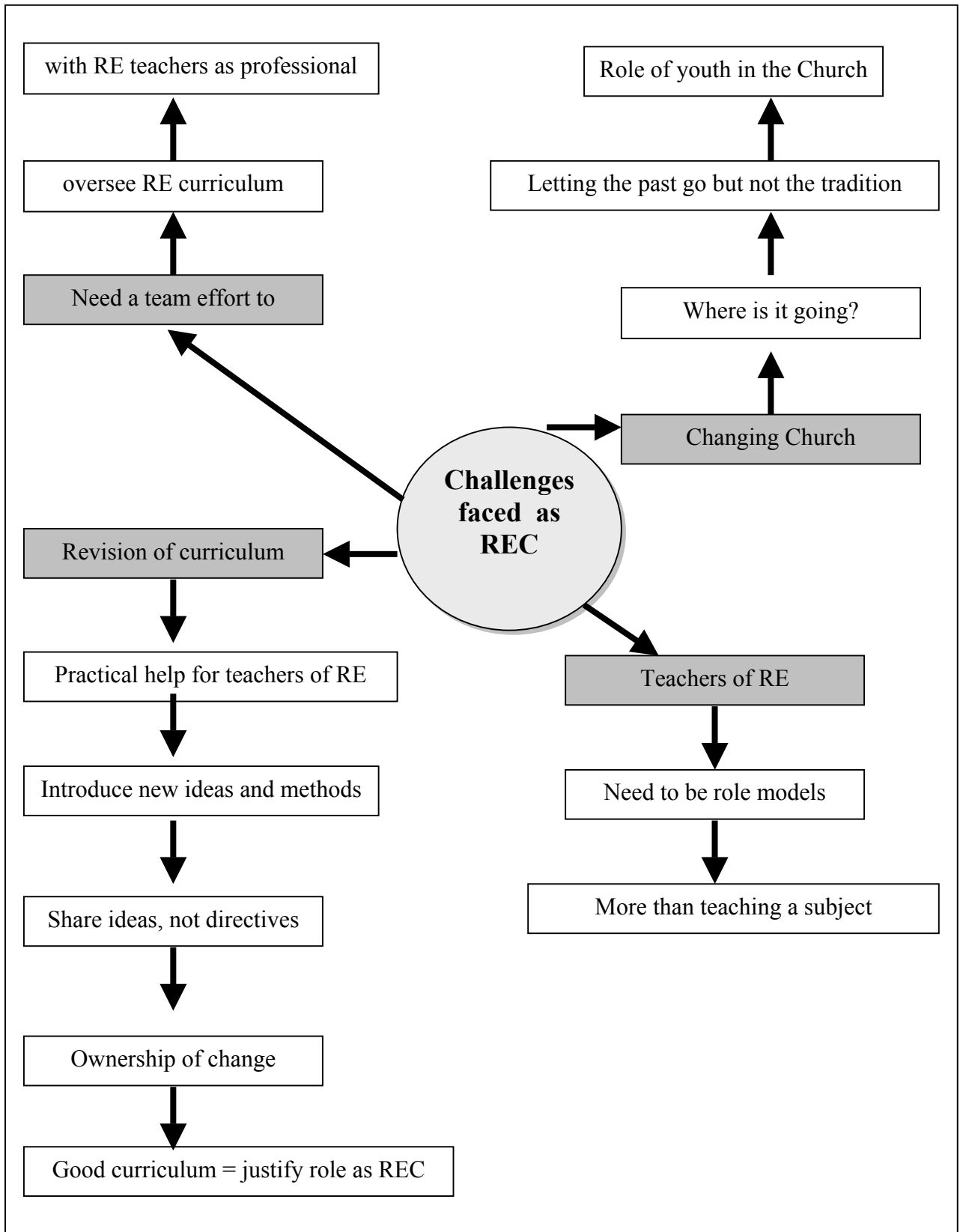
Chapter Seven

Findings on the process of selection of RECs and their interpretations of religious education

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapters in this thesis analysed theoretical dimensions of the nature and purpose of religious education contained within Church documents (Chapter Two), research findings into religious education (Chapter Three), and the historical context of RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. These chapters provided a framework within which the theoretical role of the REC could be articulated and analysed. Literature from previous studies (Chapter Five) provided a research perspective on the REC role. In Chapter Six decisions related to the empirical component of the thesis were outlined. The following chapters (Chapters Seven to Ten) present the findings and analysis of that empirical research in relation to the RECs perceptions of the role in Catholic secondary schools, and situate those findings in the context presented in the previous chapters of this thesis.

As a consequence of the inductive method of analysing data used in this thesis, categories emerged that were significant in understanding the role from the REC's perspective. Before consolidating these categories they were tested on three separate occasions with three different reference groups. After the initial coding and classification, the researcher distributed interviews to two other researchers who were familiar with the grounded theory methodology that was used in the research. They were asked to ascertain what categories they found in the data. The results were very similar to the researcher's original categories and provided assistance in the next layer of analysis.

In February 2001, a second test was carried out on the initial categories. On this occasion the analysis of interviews was presented to the RECs from the Catholic secondary schools in the Diocese of Sandhurst, Victoria. At this professional development day, the researcher was invited to convey the findings of his research. The RECs were presented with the initial findings and were asked to comment on them with particular reference to the similarities and divergences from

their own experience of being RECs in Catholic secondary schools. Feedback from the RECS emphasised that the findings from the interviews coincided with their own situation to a significant degree.

In April 2001, the findings of the research were again presented for feedback at the Australian Catholic University Symposium on Religious Education. The symposium brought together researchers in religious education, members from a range of CEOs, RECs and religious educators from schools and parishes across Australia. Material from the research was presented to participants and they were asked to comment on the extent to which the findings were consistent with the role of the REC as they understood it within their own context. It became obvious from the discussion that followed the presentation that the categories that emerged from the data should not be seen as separate. The categories were fundamentally interconnected. The participants suggested that these categories were almost like pieces of a jigsaw that only made complete sense when all the pieces were put together. They also argued that having separate categories might be artificial because in the daily operation of the role in Catholic secondary schools there were not many roles, but one role. For example, emerging from the interviews were data relating to the challenges faced in the role. In addition, data emerged on the skills and qualities that were needed for fulfilling the role. Participants at the Symposium remarked that the challenges faced by RECs were another way of articulating the skills that one needs to be an REC. For example, if the challenge was to develop viable liturgical experiences for students, this implied that the REC needed to possess the necessary skills to provide such experiences. Consequently, while the written analysis of the findings from the data had to be undertaken in separate categories, these categories were in fact part of a larger matrix which interconnected and overlapped.

These three formal presentations of the data enabled the researcher to refine the categories and to delve further into the text of the interviews to explore the connections and possible meanings of the data. The findings are presented in the following chapters of this thesis.

7. 2 The approach to presentation of findings and their analysis

It is common in empirical research for the findings of the data to be presented in separate chapters from the analysis. This thesis alters that format to

some degree, while maintaining the differentiation between findings and analysis. In Chapters Seven to Nine, the findings are presented in the first part of each chapter followed by the analysis in the second part. Chapter Ten presents a synthesis of findings and makes a series of recommendations. The five major categories that emerged from the data are represented in Figure 7.1. In Chapter Seven the findings and analysis from categories one and two are presented, in Chapter Eight the findings and analysis from categories three and four, and in Chapter Nine the findings and analysis of category five.

Figure 7.1 The major categories of findings in relation to the RECs' understanding of their role
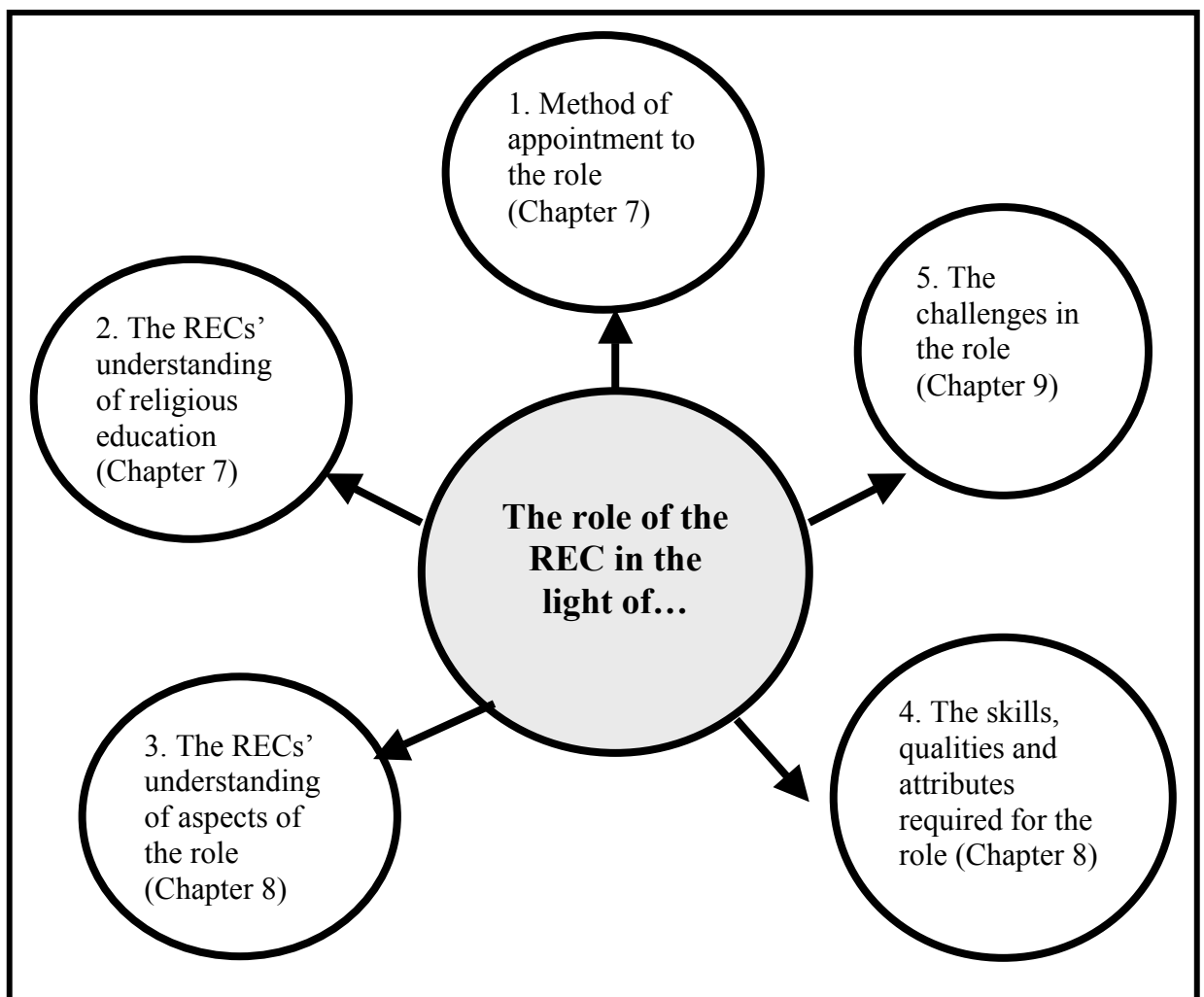
In the presentation of these findings the researcher has deliberately chosen extensive and regular use of direct quotations to support the arguments being proposed. This format most suitably supported the major aim of the research, which was ascertain the RECs' perceptions of their role with the least possible filtering.

Using extensive quotations provided a means of presenting the RECs' opinions and descriptions. To maintain the anonymity of the RECs, a letter code (A, B, etc.) has been used instead of their names, and references to individual's and school's names have been removed from the text. As argued in Chapter Six, inductive analysis and grounding theory in the data enabled the construction of categories which represented the views of the RECs without the necessity to quantify them. Consequently, the researcher has used expressions such as "many", "some", "one" and "another" in reference to the RECs' statements to give a sense of the weight of the responses.

7.3 Category 1 findings: Why individuals choose to become RECs

How RECs came into the role

As outlined in Chapter Six, all the in-depth unstructured interviews commenced with a question that asked the participants why they had decided to accept the role of REC. This uniform question was designed to discover what motivated the respondent to become an REC. It was also a way of enabling those interviewed to become as relaxed as possible by focusing on an aspect of their personal experience, rather than commencing with questions or discussions about religious education theory which may have been perceived as threatening. Such questions may have made it appear the tone of the interview was one of testing people's knowledge, rather than being a mutual investigation of the issues surrounding the role of the REC, which had been stated in the letter sent to RECs immediately prior to the interview.

A range of responses was given to the initial question and the findings on the reasons for becoming RECS have been organised into two sections. The first section relates to the process by which RECs were appointed and the major reasons are presented in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2 Process for appointment into the REC role

Deliberate decision to seek the role

Logical progression of professional career from religious education teacher

Unintentional outcome

There was no one else so I felt compelled

Many, but not all, of the RECs explained that the decision to become an REC was a deliberate decision. For these RECs there were a number of factors that brought them to that decision. Most RECs stated that they knew something of the role by observation of other RECs with whom they had worked. Another had studied what was involved in the position in terms of understanding the demands of the religious education curriculum and challenges involved in working with religious education teachers:

> I decided to write my thesis on seeing what was involved in co-ordinating RE teachers, and once I found out what was involved and what the job description was I decided, yeah, I could do this and I've done it ever since (A).

For others, the opportunity to step into the role presented itself, and they felt confident of their ability:

> I thought I knew enough then to take it on, and then I think the opportunity came its way, you might say. Because up to then, basically there had been other people and I thought, "Well, this is my chance to give it a go, try it out" (M).

Another REC spoke of the importance of knowing what was involved in the role before accepting it, as well as being given confidence in his ability by the Principal:

> And I hadn't thought to become an REC, I was looking for a new job, and the Principal said, "You'd be good as an REC'" and I said, "Well, I don't have any experience. I've hardly taught RE for a start, but I've just finished a Bachelor of Theology. I need some more time to think about it, and I need some more experience." And he said. "No, I think you'd be really good, I want you to do it." So we had a bit of a tussle for a while, and on condition that he understood that I was a new chum at this, I took the job on (B).

For others the role of the REC had some inherent attractiveness and opportunities on other professional levels, particularly for those with an interest and confidence in the development of religious education curriculum. One REC stated, "I wanted the curriculum side of it" (D). For another the leadership dimension of the role was important: "I'd been in a position of leadership as a coordinator, and I just saw it as

the next step" (B). Professional motives were strong influences in RECs' decisions to undertake the role.

While some RECs had made deliberate plans to take the step to become RECs, for others the step was not part of a plan but arose more as a logical progression of teaching interest and experience. Experience of being a religious education teacher, perhaps assisting in the role of REC at a particular year level, often provided a logical basis from which they moved into the role:

> I had just come out of a postulancy … so therefore had a religious label on my head from the start. So therefore in the third year at [this school] I was persuaded to become assistant RE Coordinator, and then in the fourth year I was at [the school] the RE Coordinator took study leave so I inherited being the RE Coordinator. So it wasn't what you'd call anything intentional on my part, when you come to think of it, but it was probably a logical movement that probably came a bit earlier than I expected… It was just like an inherited thing. I had worked closely with the RE Coordinator the previous year, so it wasn't an unreasonable thing (E).

Experience in other professional and vocational areas of life outside school was also cited among the determining factors in becoming an REC. Some of the RECs, like the one above, had spent time as members of religious orders or had entered the seminary. Others had extensive experience in youth ministry and parish work. These experiences gave prospective RECs a personal and professional interest in the role that was more akin to the extension of a religious 'vocation'. RECs with this background were attracted particularly to the faith dimensions of the role because faith dimensions were a critical part of their own lives:

> I think also largely it had to come down to a decision which was based on vocation as well, having spent three years in a seminary and also having a number of years with an association with local parishes… There's a strong core I suppose, and a sense of faith (G).

As will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Eight, those interviewed for this thesis were unanimous in stating that the REC role required people who had specialist studies in religious education. The corollary of this was that many RECs said they would not have applied for the position of REC without having the necessary qualifications in religious education or being in the process of obtaining

them. Consequently, a major reason they stated for becoming an REC was the level of professional competence and skill they possessed in the area of religious education. This related to their level of confidence not just as teachers and organisers, but also specifically as religious educators.

A different experience was reported by another group of RECs. This group of RECs had no intention of putting themselves forward to be selected for the role. For this group the process for becoming an REC was the unsolicited request from the school Principal:

> She advertised an REC's position and phoned me and said, "I don't know if you've noticed but I've advertised this and if you're interested I'd like you to write a letter regarding it" (F).

Another had a direct request from the Principal: "She asked me if I would take on the RE position" (J). Yet another said she had just come back from long service leave and the Principal "wanted to know why I particularly had not applied for the job" (O). One REC who had worked in that role in two different schools recalled that in both schools he had never applied for the position but was asked to undertake the role by the local Principal:

> It's interesting; I didn't opt in either case… I was specifically asked to take on that role, and I didn't apply for it (W).

Some RECs commented that they gained a degree of self-confidence from the Principal when they were asked to take on the role without having applied. It was the show of confidence in them by the Principal that was a determining factor in their final decision.

Another saw a vacancy and because they were qualified they applied for the position without any prior plans:

> I think at the time I perceived that there weren't many other people in the school willing to do it, were qualified to do it, interested in doing it… I could see all of these things that were crying out to be done and I thought that I could do some of them (Q).

A different experience was reported by a small but significant number of RECs who felt they were selected because they were the only people in the school who were either willing or qualified, in one form or another, to take on the role. They felt a degree of pressure to accept the role. There was a sense that if they didn't say yes there would be nobody else to undertake the role. One REC recalled:

> The school had lost its previous RE coordinator through ill health, and there was nobody else who had any formal RE training who was ready to do it (H).

Overall, the RECs expressed the view that the paths to the position of REC were varied. As has been stated previously in this thesis, the CEOM does not demand that a particular process be followed, and does not lay down criteria for the role. Schools make their own decisions in these matters and therefore there was often not a uniform process across schools. In these situations the key factor in the appointment process was the judgement of the Principal, and he/she dictated the processes for the appointment.

However, the process of selection of those RECs who felt pressured to accept the role because no one else would apply for the position highlighted some significant issues. First, why was it that suitably qualified individuals did not want the role? Previous research into the role, as outlined in Chapter Four of this thesis, showed that the role was very stressful, particularly in the areas of liturgy, pastoral care and membership of the school leadership/administrative team. The process of appointment itself was not one that was used for other significant leadership positions within the school. Issues surrounding the interview process are examined in the next section.

Interview process for the selection of the REC

Common to the varied methods by which RECS were appointed to the role was the interview process for the position once an application was received. Many of those interviewed discussed the interview that was part of their appointment. The majority reported that during the interview with the Principal and other members of the selection panel, the focus of the questioning was on what the person brought to the role of REC. Many reported that at the selection interview there were very few questions that dealt with theories of religious education or

knowledge of contemporary issues in religious education curriculum. Furthermore, there were limited discussions about the issue of the identity of a Catholic school and the contribution that an REC would make in its development. One REC commented that the Principal "didn't lay down any tremendous expectations" (J). Another recalled that when the Principal was asked to articulate a vision for the REC, nothing was forthcoming. "I was asked by the Principal would I be interested and I said, 'What exactly do you expect from that role? What do they do?' And he was suitably vague, I suppose because he would like me to take on the role and do as I would see fit" (G). Another REC, reflecting on his experience, described how he had to develop the role "almost entirely myself" and "there was virtually no paperwork to go with it" to provide assistance (W). The following larger extract from an interview gives this insight:

> *Q. When you applied for the job, and got the job, did the leadership team, or the Principal ... clearly spell out to you what they were hoping with the role?*
>
> A. No.
>
> *Q. They didn't?*
>
> A. No.
>
> *Q. Nothing at all?*
>
> A. Well basically, I think the fact that it was such a multi-faceted role, it wasn't like "okay, in RE I want you to do this, and in faith development I want you to do that". It was like "fine, there's the job, there's the role, good luck to you" (D).

The lack of direction about the role of the REC and about the nature of the Catholic school in their interviews was disconcerting for some RECs. The lack of discussion about the nature and purpose of religious education and contemporary issues was also disconcerting. Restricting questions to the personal qualities that they brought to the role seemed to RECs to be particularly narrow and limited. These processes within the selection interview suggested that religious education, the nature of a Catholic school and the role of the REC were perceived by school leadership to be more about the personal qualities of the applicant than a knowledge of the task and the skills that were required to be effective in the role. The qualifications, experience and skills that the applicant needed to possess to be an

effective REC had been relegated to second place behind notions of the personal suitability of the candidate.

Another REC who had held the position in a number of different schools recalled two completely different interview experiences. In the first there was no direction from the Principal. In his current school he had been given direction and subjected to much questioning about the role from the Principal:

> And I can recall going for the interview the first time, he made fairly clear in a written sort of format through a role description… But I can recall during the interview being, I wouldn't say grilled heavily, but being challenged with a lot of how that particular Principal saw the role (B).

The lack of a consistent approach across the Catholic school system in the Archdiocese of Melbourne to the appointment of RECs, and reliance upon the judgement of the Principal, runs the risk that the selection of RECs may be flawed. Under the current arrangements applicants may be selected who conform only to the Principal's view of the nature of religious education, a view that may not be completely informed.

Commitment to Catholic school vision as a factor in becoming an REC

Further data relevant to the selection of the REC related not to the process of appointment but to the applicant's motivation for accepting the role. Primarily, the RECs commented on their belief in, and commitment to, the importance of a Catholic vision for the school. This commitment also led them to be interested in religious education and the contribution they could make as RECs to the Catholic and religious life of the school. Religious education as perceived by RECs was inextricably connected to the Catholic ethos. In the minds of the RECs, the Catholic ethos of the school was a central concern of the REC's role:

> I have a very strong belief or vision of a Catholic school, that because the RE positions that I've taken have also had a position on leadership teams, I've been able to have some impact in making a contribution to the whole life of the school (F).

One of those interviewed, who was an REC in the mid-late 1970s, reflected on his reasons for becoming an REC. For him it was vitally important that RECs were both qualified and committed to Catholic education:

> I suppose when I was having a look at teaching in a religious school, I thought that, one, the number of religious was declining… they needed people who were qualified… I began doing study, and I just felt it was an important area for lay people to be involved in, and to have qualifications in (P).

A belief and a commitment to Catholic education were extended by some of those interviewed to include components of their own faith. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, RECs chose the role because it fitted in with their own faith as a response to a vocation, a calling to be involved. "It came down to a decision which was based on vocation as well" and a "sense of faith" (G).

<u>Summary</u>

In the mind of many RECs, the interview processes revealed that personal qualities were given priority over other criteria in the selection process. Aligned with this was the understanding that an individual's commitment to faith was also critical. The REC as a committed witness to the Catholic faith was the quality most sought after in the applicant. This conceptualisation of the role was based upon the understanding of religious education as primarily catechesis, as was outlined in Chapter Two. Emphasis on this quality almost to the exclusion of others was a common experience although the reasons for this were not forthcoming. It may be a result of the fact that Principals may not have a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education within the context of schools. They may be transferring understandings of religious education from the parish domain to schools. Moreover, it may reflect a lack of awareness of the educational component of the role that means that these areas of the role were not dealt with in the selection interview. On the other hand, the processes for selection of the REC may indicate that in reality religious education does not have a high priority in the school.

7.4 Category 2 findings: RECs' perceptions of the nature of religious education

During the interviews RECs made regular observations on what they understood by religious education. As shown in Chapter Six, the methodology

employed 'open-ended' questions in an in-depth approach, and questions used by the researcher emerged from the context of what was being discussed. There were no prescribed questions. Consequently, the interviewees were not directly asked, "What do you understand is the nature of religious education?" Rather, findings on the RECs' perceptions about the nature of religious education were embedded in the text of the conversation and in their responses and reflections, and emerged in the analysis processes.

It became evident after the analysis of the findings that RECs' understanding of religious education that they had drawn from a range of theories (cf. Chapters Two and Three). These theories formed an amalgam out of which the RECs drew an operational theoretical framework through which they described their understandings of religious education

Historical development of the nature of religious education

The research design deliberately selected RECs across the time span of the thesis (1970-2000). Some of the RECs were in that role in the 1970s, others in the 1980s and others in the 1990s. Those RECs who had been in the role across those decades were able to reflect upon some of the key historical developments they saw in the understanding of the nature of religious education. Some of these developments were analysed at length in Chapters One to Three of this thesis. One of the developments was the life-centred approach to education (Grimmitt 1973; Goldman 1965). This was later replaced with a more educational approach to religious education because teachers were not familiar with the methodology of the life-centred approach and it consequently fell into disrepute with them. One REC reflected on the nature of religious education in this life-centred approach:

> I remember very clearly teaching Yr 12 in the late '70s, we
> went in and asked them what they wanted to learn… So it
> was things related to their life, but they didn't have basic
> concepts upon which to make decisions, so it was a purely
> emotive type of RE (C).

Another REC reflected upon the change from the life-centred approach to a more educational approach:

> I was teaching 'warm and fuzzies' for two reasons: I didn't
> know what else to teach and that was sort of the basis of the

> curriculum in those days… I think we have better quality text
> material, support material available to us now. I think we've
> recognised that the 'warm fuzzy, Jesus is my friend' is fine to
> a point but is not challenging enough, either to teachers or to
> students… The recent developments in terms of curriculum
> have been a great leap forward (U).

As shown in Chapter Four, O'Loughlin led a critical meeting at the RECs Conference in 1980. This was the first time that a deliberate attempt had been made to blend the catechetical, life-centred and educational elements into a coherent understanding of religious education. Some four years later, in 1984, the publication of a new edition of the *Guidelines* incorporated these three elements. The most recent *Guidelines* (1995) were seen as particularly helpful to RECs in the development of an understanding of a religious education curriculum that was suitable for the present understanding of religious education:

> I think things like the new RE Guidelines for the Archdiocese
> of Melbourne (1995) have taken up a lot of that, and people
> have been challenged to try to develop a curriculum which
> encompasses that broad range of religious education… So
> there's been a great deal coming through from the level of
> research and places like ACU (M).

Perceptions that approaches to religious education changed and evolved were clearly identified by the RECs. There was no indication in comments made by RECs that they would support a single approach to religious education. The different contexts within which religious education occurred within Catholic schools necessitated that a variety of approaches be used. Analysis of the data indicated that the RECs described six overlapping dimensions of religious education: knowledge, faith, educational, phenomenological, personal, spiritual.

The knowledge dimension of religious education

A central dimension of religious education for RECs was the passing on of the knowledge of the subject 'religious education' and knowledge about Catholic beliefs, traditions and practices. Moreover, for RECs the purpose of such knowledge was to enable students to answer basic questions about life:

> I think the students are bursting for religious knowledge or
> for some answers to those big questions… They're looking

for a depth of understanding of the mysteries of life that the
world can't give them, and they're looking for a religious
knowledge to give them some insights and to make sense of
their increasingly nonsensical world (A).

The method of teaching this knowledge was also important for RECs. It required an
academic approach that treated the content seriously but was always focused on the
need for this knowledge to be important and relevant to the lives of students.
Reflecting on the way in which the knowledge dimension of religious education had
changed and way in which religious education was taught, one REC commented
that religious education had:

…gone from posters, cut-outs and wishy-washy things, and
doing role plays and doing Christmas and Advent every year,
to a sequential, coordinated, more academic subject and
relating history and church doctrine and Scripture and rules
… and taking that into their own lives (U).

Another dimension of knowledge that the RECs saw as essential to the nature of
religious education was to differentiate rote learning of doctrine and the
memorisation of material, which was an essential component of the "catechism"
approach in the early twentieth century (cf. Chapter Two), from a fuller
understanding of knowledge:

I don't think we should be drumming doctrine. I think we
should be tapping into their spirituality… It's more ethical
than doctrinal (O).

Furthermore, this exploration and search for knowledge was not restricted to Catholic
understandings and answers but was broadly ecumenical. It was, as Boys (1982)
expressed it, a partnership of tradition and transformation. Religious knowledge
involved "the beauty not just of Christianity, but of other religions" (O) where
students from other religious traditions "don't feel that they have to hide the fact that
they are Buddhists or Greek Orthodox… They are asked to contribute how their
practice of religion differs" (A). This understanding of religious education was at
cross-purposes with the catechetical understandings of religious education that were
analysed in Chapters Two and Three.

RECs proposed that knowing was an essential component of religious
education and that knowing involved the application of that knowledge to life. In

many ways, this way of knowing seen as important by RECs had links with Groome's understanding of religious education (Groome 1980, 1991, 1998). This is also an essential dimension in life-centred approaches to religious education.

The faith dimension of religious education

RECs argued that of parallel importance to the knowledge dimension of religious education was the 'faith' dimension. Often these faith aspects of the religious education curriculum were associated with public faith activities such as prayer, liturgy and retreats. RECs spoke of the need for the educational and the faith components of religious education to be 'hand in glove'. Both knowledge and faith were core aspects of religious education. As mentioned above, RECs articulated the view that it was important for knowledge to be linked with the lives of students. They further argued that knowledge must be linked with faith, saying that "the knowledge component can only get us so far" (B), and if teachers are "just passing on knowledge in RE classes, it's only a very, very small contribution that they make. There's got to be a faith component" (B). Another REC stated that the religious education curriculum "has to be a vehicle towards helping young people find God, hence faith development" (F). RECs' personal convictions of the importance of faith in their own lives was often used to support the point of view that faith was important for the lives of students in their schools.

One REC stated that the very reason for his becoming an REC was that he "always hoped to be able to touch people … in a way that either strengthens the faith they have, or turns them towards the possibility of faith" (N). This grew out of his own belief and his desire "to share my own love of God and belief in the Gospel message" (N). Yet another expressed her belief "in God's vision for the world … I believe that we can make it happen, that the Kingdom can and will be a reality" (U). RECs stated that the faith dimensions of religious education also included the faith dimension of their own lives and was integral to the role of REC in Catholic schools; "I think if people see you as an RE teacher and as an RE coordinator, they automatically assume that there is a faith component there" (C).

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The educational dimension of religious education

The educational dimension of religious education also emerged as significant for the RECs. They spoke of the necessity for religious education to be based upon sound educational principles. It was not enough for schools to have a religious education that was justified merely because it was a necessary fixture in a Catholic school. Many RECs spoke of the major significance that certified religious education studies offered in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) had in enhancing the educational basis of religious education:

> That's why such subjects as "Religion and Society"[9] can open up those big questions of the meaning of life and a really meaty subject that has a strong academic content to it (A).

One of the obvious signs of this more educational dimension appeared in the language that RECs used in association with the religious education curriculum. Religious education courses were written to include "outcomes" and they "must have the educational process that every other subject had" (C). Part of the educational desire of RECs was for religious education to be taken seriously as an academic subject, and, therefore, "you've got to do the things they do in any other academic subjects" (K). To do this "you've got to assess content, understanding and skills" (K). Then the "subject area itself is seen to have a legitimacy with other subject areas" (P).

The phenomenological dimension of religious education

A number of RECs described one dimension of religious education that was not linked with a particular faith expression or religious institution. They spoke of religion as a part of the cultural context in which people live. Religious education was of philosophical and sociological importance to society. Therefore it was the role of schools to educate children about religious phenomena within the dominant culture. Clearly related to the phenomenological dimensions for RECs were the broader ecumenical dimensions of religious education that not only tolerated other faith expressions within the religious education classroom but also actively promoted

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[9] "Religion and Society" is a religious studies course offered as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education. The other study is "Text and Traditions".

them. RECs drew upon concrete examples of this ecumenical approach from their teaching experience:

> Teachers invite students to often give an opinion on things in terms of what their faith tradition would say about something, to say that that's a valid point of view … it's important for you to appreciate that and practise it, and we can learn from each other (P).

A number of RECs said that religious education in Catholic schools, rather than encouraging commitment to a particular religious tradition and their particular religious practices, should focus more on religious education as a general view of life, a philosophy that one could live by: "I tried to present the subject as first of all a philosophy, a way of life, a way of thinking" (D). This was achieved "by analysing different people and their philosophies; by talking about their way of life; by talking about their message" (D). This point of view was taken even further by another REC:

> I don't think that my job's to teach RE. Kids have got their own impressions and their own thoughts and their own beliefs… Teaching is to challenge them in the way in which they see things… So I don't think my job is to teach RE, I think my job is more to challenge kids to think wider about their own thought processes (S).

On the other hand, RECs pointed out that within the population of the Catholic school there were significant numbers of students and families who had a strong commitment to Catholicism, and the school needed to support these people in its religious education programs. "We owe a huge responsibility to those ones who have made that choice. And it's not necessarily only for religion, for some of it it's values" (N). This view of religious education in Catholic schools did not abandon a commitment to Catholicism but included other possibilities and options for a faith response from the students, families and staff.

The spiritual dimensions of religious education

The word 'spirituality' was also used by RECs to describe a particular dimension of religious education. It included elements of the 'faith' and 'life' dimensions, in that it was about personal beliefs and meaning-making that were important to the students. This spiritual dimension was not necessarily linked to any tradition, and was therefore different from the faith and ecumenical dimensions.

Many of the RECs reflected on the current situation in their schools and commented that many students (and their families) were not regular members of the worshipping Catholic Church, or any other religious institution for that matter, and their links with the formal elements of the institutional Church were minimal. Given this sociological factor, the RECs argued that conducting religious education with the purpose of encouraging students to be members of the Church was not necessarily the most appropriate approach. A broad spiritual approach was required in which the religious and spiritual aspects of religious education were the more appropriate focus. One REC commented that students in Catholic schools today "have a different sort of spirituality, a different sense of community, a different sense of church … but we've got to try and accept that, and that's part of our faith too" (B).

<u>The personal dimension of religious education</u>

Many RECs argued that one of the key aspects of religious education was its importance for the lives of the students. This personal dimension was the most regularly referred to dimension of religious education. Knowledge, faith, educational, spiritual and phenomenological dimensions were essential, but ultimately the worth and relevance of religious education depended upon how the various aspects of religious education related to the lives of students. Religious education viewed in this way was not a subject from which students just gained knowledge or studied religion merely as a social phenomenon. The overriding purpose of religious education was to affect the way students lived. Religious education had these personal and transformational elements, and the value of religious education depends, in part, on how if affects the lives of the students (Boys, 1989). One REC stated: "I see RE is really our daily life" (B). For another: "it's really about, for me, life issues" (I). For another: "I see religious education as permeating everything… It's an education for life. It's about your life; it's how you live" (N). The starting point and the content of religious education was not life, as it had been in the life-centred approach (Chapter Three); however, the purpose of religious education was to *influence* the lives of students by the content that was offered.

The following figure (7.3) is an overview of the five dimensions of the nature of religious education that were articulated by the RECs

Figure 7.3 Dimensions of religious education from the RECs' perspective
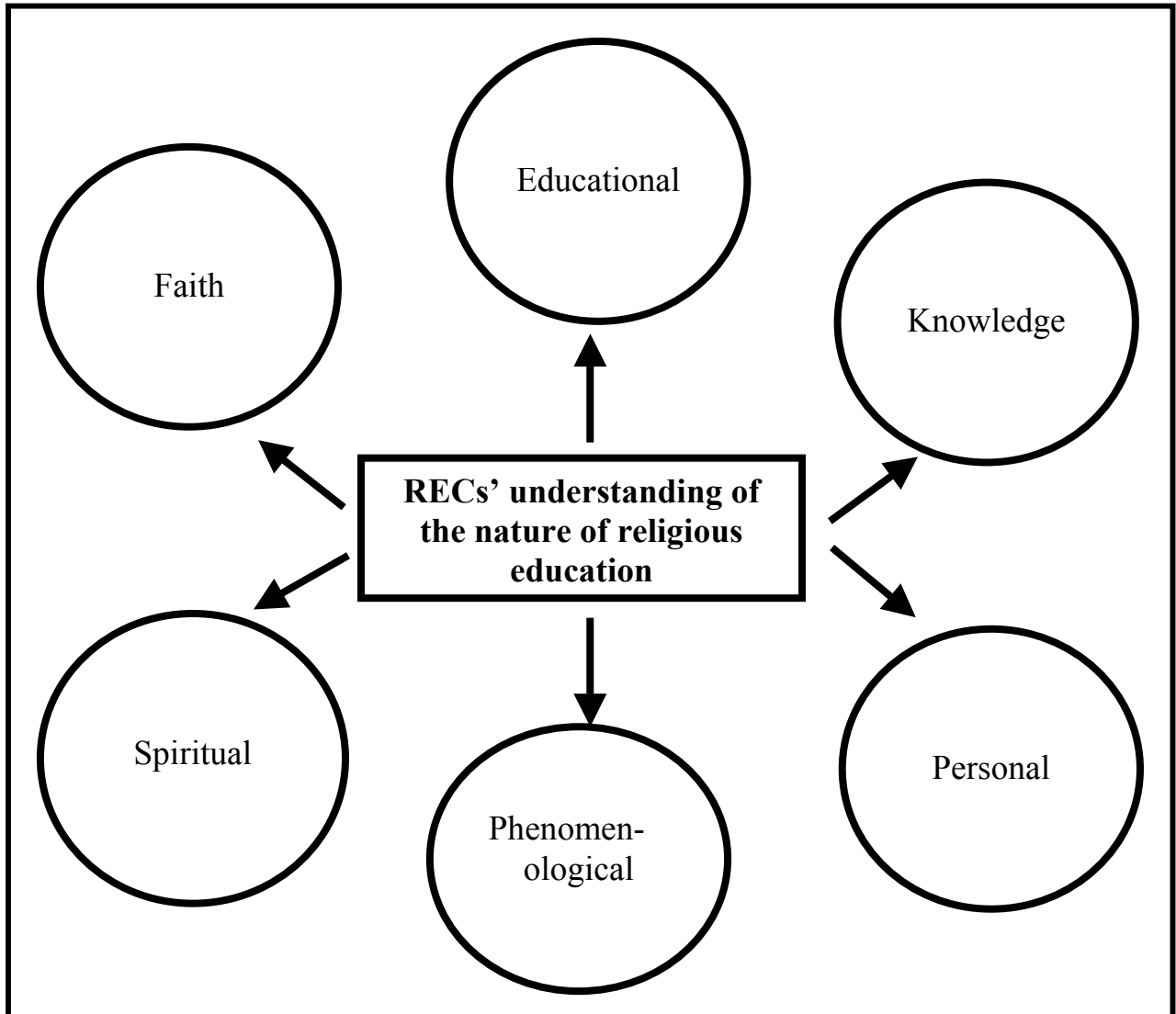
RECs stated very strongly and clearly that these were the fundamental dimensions of religious education and that, depending upon the purpose of the activity being undertaken, they were all valid and indeed overlaid each other to some degree. Their descriptions of the range of dimensions of religious education were much broader than the dimensions of religious education that were discussed at their selection interviews. RECs viewed religious education differently from many of the people who interviewed them for the role.

7.5 Analysis of the findings presented in this chapter

Analysis of the findings on the process of selection

Many of the RECs indicated that there was no centralised or uniform process for appointing RECs to Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and that this was in contrast to other dioceses in Australia that have policies and procedures in place. For most of the RECs, the decision to choose the role was deliberate and intentional. Often RECs were approached by the Principal to apply because the Principal saw them as suitable. A smaller but significant number were asked to apply because no one else had applied. As outlined in Chapter Five, Sierakowski (1991) researched the role of RECs in primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Her research also examined the processes for selecting RECs. Her findings were similar to the findings presented in this thesis. She found that there was no pattern to the selection and appointment processes and very little induction into the role.

A significant number of RECs spoke of their motivation to become RECs in terms of a 'vocation'. The term 'vocation' has been regularly used in Church documents (Chapter Two) to describe the role of the teachers in Catholic schools. Associated with this term is the emphasis on witness (Section 2.5). Clearly from the perspective of the Church, the witnessing to faith is central to the understanding of the vocation of teachers in Catholic schools. The process that occurred within the interviews confirmed the priority of this understanding. As outlined in Chapter Five of this thesis, some researchers (Johnson 1989; Rymarz 1997a) have also stressed the vocational aspect of teachers in Catholic schools. Johnson (1989) in her study of RECs argued that the witnessing to faith as part of the vocation was a critical factor for RECs. She extended her argument and claimed that to be effective the REC had to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

The role of the Principal in the selection processes was crucial. In what may be considered the 'normal' process, applicants apply through the appropriate channels, attend interviews and, if selected, are offered the position. More positively, other RECs felt a degree of confidence when asked by the Principal to fulfil the role. Another group said the role was a natural progression from the role they had already been undertaking in schools and that they had moved comfortably into the

REC role as a logical next step in their professional life. However, a substantial number of RECs were deliberately selected by the Principal and asked to consider the position prior to and/or outside the formal processes of the interviews. They were often offered the position without any formal process being used. This made the judgement of the Principal the key element in the process, over and above the interview panel and the rest of the school administrative/leadership team. This was vastly different from the processes mandated in many other dioceses (Section 4.4) where there is a highly centralised and formal process that is binding on the Principal. There are no such arrangements mandated for the schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. This raises the question of whether the appointment of the RECs is too critical to be left in the hands of schools.

Both the centralised process and the flexible process have their strengths. One argument in favour of the flexible approach is that the wide divergences between schools in terms of size, general organisational structures, how the REC role is structured and the place of the REC on the administrative/leadership team make flexibility and localised processes seem more appropriate than centralised arrangements. The value of centralised arrangements is that there is a guarantee that the applicant meets certain basic requirements and that basic working agreements are in place in the school. From RECs comments many appointments appeared not to be handled professionally at present.

Also of concern for a significant number of RECs was the interview process itself. They spoke of the lack of direction they were given about the role before, during and after the interview. Often they were given minimal direction to do as they saw fit and were at times left wondering what the role entailed. For those new to the role this was particularly stressful. RECs stated that they were often given a role statement and little else. The Principals at the time of the interview did not delegate to the REC specific religious education and leadership functions and did not emphasise specific aspects of the school role description of the REC. As pointed out by one REC, the list of jobs on the role statement did not provide a vision for the role. RECs knew in broad terms what the job entailed; what they wanted was a particularised vision for the role. None of the RECs believed that they could or should be expected to follow the role descriptions that had been devised by the CEOM or the local school as these were too broad and it was impossible to do all the

things contained in them. The balance that RECs sought was neither a slavish implementation of a generic role description, nor an absence of direction, but rather a specific, achievable plan, and an overview of the nature of religious education as it applied to this particular school and the expectations that the school had of the REC. The experience of the RECs was that localised, specific planning and articulation of the vision of a Catholic school was not always provided, and they perceived this to be a distinct shortcoming. These concerns added to the sense of dislocation and lack of clarity about their role.

<u>Analysis of the findings on the perceptions of religious education</u>

In Chapter Two of this thesis, literature on religious education originating in the Church's documentary tradition (both international and national) and in the writings of theorists and researchers in religious education showed a very broad and sometimes contradictory understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education. Often these contradictory views were a result of applying catechesis in a parish context to religious education in a school context. In the school context the documents from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (Section 2.5), especially the RDE, attempted to clarify that distinction. The difference between catechesis and religious education was stated clearly in the GDC (Section 2.4). Researchers (Rummery 1975; Rossiter 1983, Moran; 1991) have also pointed to a need for clarity in this area.

The key elements of the nature of religious education as outlined by the RECs were: knowledge, educational, faith, phenomenological, personal and spiritual (Figure 7.2). Furthermore, there was an understanding by those RECs who had been teaching in Catholic schools for many years that the perceptions of the nature of religious education had changed over time, and that schools respond to and conceptualise religious education in a concrete historical reality that is constantly changing.

It is clear from both the literature on religious education and from the perceptions of RECs that there is no simple definition or singular meaning that can be given to religious education. The very essence of religious education is that it has many aspects to its nature and that these aspects overlap significantly. The generic term 'religious education', while it has its limitations, is understood as being

multivalent. RECs were forthright in explaining ▤ the nature of religious education in a particular instance depends upon the activity/situation undertaken and the purpose of the particular activity/situation. The specific religious education curriculum in the formal classroom was almost always referred to in an educational context and for the purpose of enabling the students to gain knowledge, skills and understanding. A particularly strong influence in this context had been the availability to senior students (Years 11 and 12) in Catholic schools of formal studies of religious education as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education. These studies had their origins in the 1980s and have continued to be developed as part of the accredited units of study. The two current studies available, "Religion and Society" and "Text and Traditions", are equivalent in every respect to all other studies that make up the VCE. Religious education as it is taught and studied in this framework is educational and is based on the analysis of the understanding of broad religious educational language. It is based upon the premise that religion is a part of the fabric of society and needs to be studied as a phenomenon within the culture.

Other circumstances and purposes also prompted RECs to view a dimension of religious education as catechesis. This is an understanding of religious education that is central to the Church documentary tradition (Chapter Two). RECs perceived religious education as allowing and aiming for the possibility of catechesis within the school context. Often the catechetical aspects of religious education were mentioned explicitly in relation to prayer, liturgy and sacramental activities. However, a significant number of RECs highlighted that a division between the knowledge and catechetical aspects of religious education was not appropriate. These aspects were, in the understanding of the RECs, mutually supportive. This division is central to the debate between Rossiter (1982) and Groome (1992) on the "creative divorce between religious education and catechesis". For RECs the knowledge and educational elements give a basis for a continuous critique of the faith dimension of religious education and vice versa. Religious education is not just about knowledge and not just about faith, but about both (Chapter Two). In addition, the RECs were forthright in arguing that neither knowledge/education nor faith experience was of ultimate benefit unless it tapped into the personal lives of the students. In that sense, the life-experience approach to religious education was still a critical component. The life-centred methodology that was tried in the 1970s did not last. However, the philosophy of the life-centred approach was still deemed to be essential by the RECs.

While some of the experience of life-centred education pointed to the inadequacies of the way in which it was undertaken, the basic philosophy of life-centred education had a significant impact on RECs and their perceptions of religious education.

While not naming the sources from which they developed their own view of the nature of religious education, it is clear that the RECs' understandings of religious education reflected the elements of the major documents and theories mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis. Furthermore, they showed an awareness of the complexity of the nature of religious education and how a particular understanding of religious education can only be achieved when there is an understanding of the context in which it is occurring. No one definition of religious education can be applied universally to the many aspects of religious education in a Catholic secondary school. The influence of the major documents on religious education and the work of the researchers into religious education has had a profound impact on the way in which RECs articulate the dimensions of religious education.

Chapter Eight

Findings on RECs' perception of the role

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven presented an analysis of the first two major categories of findings in this thesis: the manner in which the RECs were selected and appointed to their role, and the RECs' perceptions of the nature of religious education. Chapter Eight presents findings on categories three and four: the perceptions that RECs have about the nature of their role; the perceived status within Catholic schools; the skills and attributes that were required for the role and the relationship of the CEOM to the REC . The findings raised issues about the dimensions of the role and the status of the role, and described the skills required to effectively undertake the role.

8.2 Category 3 findings: The RECs' perceptions of the role

This section presents data related to the ways in which the RECs perceived their role. There are strong links between this section and the material covered in Section 7.4 on the nature of religious education. The complexity and breadth of the role was indicated in the six dimensions of religious education that were outlined by the RECs. As mentioned at the commencement of this thesis, the term 'REC' was the most common term used in schools to designate the position and person whose role it was to coordinate religious education. However, since the early 1990s there has been an increasing trend for schools to have Faith Development Coordinators (FDCs) as well as RECs (Figure 4.7). In the following sections the nature of both roles has been treated under the generic title REC.

<u>The role of the individual REC</u>

Historically and currently the majority of RECs have sole responsibility for the coordination of religious education. These RECs have responsibility for the religious education curriculum in the classroom, the compulsory faith activities outside the classroom and for all other activities that come under the umbrella of religious education. In effect, the REC under these arrangements "does everything" including "retreats, liturgies, curriculum" (A). A common consequence was that "to be an REC is probably one of the most thankless positions" (U). It was thankless for

this REC because of the enormous range of tasks that had to be undertaken and the inevitability of not being able to adequately do them all:

> Being given so many hats, REC covers an enormous number
> of hats… If you are an RE coordinator – well, certainly in my
> experience – you look after curriculum, you looked after the
> entire prayer life of the school, you oversaw the entire liturgy
> program of the school. You have responsibility for …
> graduation masses and end of year masses and beginning of
> year masses and the retreat program (U).

RECs with this sole responsibility often described their role in two parts: coordination of religious education and coordination of faith development. In theory, both parts of the role required relatively equal attention, as seen in the role descriptions written by schools (Appendices 11 and 12). In reality, the experiences of RECs suggested that the faith development part of the role consumed the most time and energy:

> There would have been equal emphasis, but in reality the
> other stuff takes up your time because it's the stuff that's got
> to be done, whereas curriculum can always roll on (E).

One of the consequences of the dominance of the faith component of the role was the impact on the religious education curriculum that took place on a daily basis in the classrooms. RECs were not able to give appropriate time and attention to the classroom curriculum as they wanted:

> Well, I reckon that I spent more periods doing Faith
> Development stuff than RE stuff… I want to be the REC, the
> curriculum coordinator for the religious education area (L).

The public demands on RECs, as well as being time-consuming, gave rise to other pressures. Many RECs sensed that public religious events placed the religious education program and the REC on display in a unique way compared with any other position in the school. This was both positive and negative. Public events provided an opportunity to enhance the profile or status of religious education: "Good liturgies, I think, by its very nature: that seems to give a lot of status to the REC" (M). But it also placed enormous pressure on the person:

So it was bigger, the job is bigger than any other faculty head
and yet you are often given the same sort of status, if that is
the word, as any other faculty head. I think it is sad that it
still exists – the fact, in many schools, that the REC is not a
member of the admin team. I think that is outrageous (U).

The role of the REC when sharing the role with an FDC

Since the mid-1990s the percentage of RECs who have shared the role
with an FDC has risen to approximately 20%. Across the schools that have these
organisational arrangements, the distinction depended upon how the positions of
FDC and REC were defined in the school. Nevertheless, the general pattern was that
when the role was shared, the REC had responsibility for classroom religious
education curriculum and had a similar function to other coordinators of subject areas
within the school. The role then involved the coordination of the planning, writing,
delivering and evaluation of classroom religious education. Under these shared
arrangements, the REC was responsible for the curriculum in religious education
classrooms:

When I think of them separate, I think of the REC as having
the responsibilities for curriculum and what goes on in the
classroom (N).

The FDC under these arrangements had responsibility for all religious education
activities outside the classroom:

…the Faith Development dimension … which means
organising masses, organising retreats, organising reflection
days, looking after staff faith development as much as with
the students as well. And I think also trying to engender
within the school community something of a faith dimension
(G).

The extent to which the faith dimension of the role necessarily required the REC to
become involved in the faith lives of all staff members was raised by one REC. This
REC argued that:

I'm not sure what the faith role is, to tell you the truth. Where
it becomes intrusive – I've always been concerned with staff,
I think you can give them some opportunities for reflection…
I don't know that it's the role of the school to be intruding in
their faith life (P).

Many RECs expressed the view that the faith dimension of religious education is an important aspect of the role in connection with the religious education curriculum. They argued that the faith dimension of the person of the REC was also important: "the number one thing is that the effectiveness or the message or whatever that they [RECs] project comes from their own faith" (D). RECs need to have "a commitment to the faith" because "you can actually live through that subject. You can express your life and your thoughts and philosophies through that subject" (D). For another REC, the role is "working for the Kingdom" (K).

These points of view of the RECs on the faith dimensions of their role rest to some degree on the proposition that the Catholic school is a community of faith. This perspective was expressed in the literature analysed in Chapters Two and Three. The faith dimension is a central aspect of the role. Yet the faith dimension should not be restricted to those activities outside the classroom As Rossiter (1998) argues, faith experiences should not exclude the cognitive dimensions of religious education in the classroom.

Arguments surrounding the dividing of the role of REC into FDC and REC

Those interviewed continually referred to the size of the REC role, stating that it was ever-expanding and "getting too big" (J). This created a sense that RECs were not "able to do everything as well as [they] would like to do" (A). Historically schools attempted to deal with this problem by having Year Level Coordinators of religious education and Assistant RECs who were to assist the REC in small designated ways. The trend now is to divide the role into REC/FDC. It was clear from the interviews that RECs understand this division of the role is driven by practical considerations of workload, with little reference to the theoretical implications, as pointed out by Rossiter (1998). One REC commented:

> For me it [splitting REC and FDC] was entirely practical, so I don't see the person developing the religious education curriculum as outside of the faith dimension of the college. I mean, they're integral to it (E).

This division was practical in that one person could not successfully undertake the role and therefore it had to be divided:

I mean, in some schools, you just can't find a person who can
do the whole job… But I think there's a recognition now that
the job is too big, and that there are segments of it that really
could be done by other people, one or more other people (K).

While the role was divided so that the numerous tasks could be undertaken by different people, those interviewed did not want to make a theoretical distinction between the roles. RECs did not propose that there was a theoretical distinction between religious education and faith development. One REC explained it this way: "I mean, it's like a hand and a glove; I don't think you can have one without having the other" (B). For another, one role "informed the other" and "I really don't think I'd like to separate them" (N). Another stated: "I would find it very difficult to separate the two, because there is constant overlap" (D). For yet another, while some of the tasks in the role may be separated, the total curriculum could not be, and the two aspects were dependent upon each other.

A number of RECs and FDCs commented that although the roles had been theoretically divided in the role description, they really worked together and simply shared tasks, as they needed to be done:

I can't see how you can divide faith and RE curriculum. I just
have no concept of how the thing is divided. Faith should be
coming out of what's happening in the classroom (J).

The fact that authorities in schools have opted for this organisational division of the role indicates a lack of theoretical and practical understanding of the role. As the RECs themselves said, the role cannot be separated either theoretically or practically. The division can be made in role statements, but not in the day-to-day reality of school life. Commenting on this developing trend of dividing the role, one REC argued that the CEOM and the Principals did not have a plan to deal with the increased workload of the RECs and failed to provide a centralised way of tackling the problem:

The CEO didn't have an expectation, they just let it emerge,
and so consequently Principals had no idea, and they put all
the Catholicity in the basket and said to the REC, "Here it is,
go for it!", and it was too big (C).

The lack of CEOM direction in this area has been raised before in this thesis. The CEOM has operated out of a model which supports schools and gives them the

authority to make arrangements about staffing and organisational structures at the local level. On the other hand, Section 4.2 of this thesis showed that from the mid-1970s to the most recent forums on religious education in 1999, RECs have been urging the CEOM to provide greater direction to school authorities about support for RECs and about organisational arrangements for their role.

Not all RECs, however, were in agreement on the issue of the desirability of the CEOM intervening and enforcing a structure on schools. All did not accept the suggestion that a centralised approach would remedy the structural and theoretical problems. Some argued instead that the current decentralised approach to the articulation of the various roles should remain and schools be allowed to develop the role based upon local needs and staff:

> And I wouldn't want any central directive. I don't like the Queensland system because of that reason. I mean, it gives quite legitimate and quite substantial status to the REC, but it also hamstrings you in a whole range of ways, which I don't think is that helpful. To bring out a broad statement about it all, you're going to convince the people that are already convinced, and the people that aren't already convinced are going to go along despite it. Maybe if there was a specific directive that came out from the CEO to Principals about recommended conditions that was pretty strong, well, you'd have to look at it. But it's a very complex one (E).

The critical factor is finding a balance between the independence of the school to determine structures for the school that takes into account all the local factors, and the importance of a centralised arrangement for RECs. The findings of this thesis suggest that such a balance does not exist, and the majority of RECs would support stronger CEOM involvement in establishing such a balance.

The place of the RECs on the school administrative/leadership team

Literature on RECs in religious education guidelines and in research has stressed the importance of the role of the REC. Therefore it was understandable that RECs spoke about their role in connection to leadership. As shown earlier (Figure 4.16), data from the CEOM indicated that at one level the RECs leadership position was recognised by the number of schools that had their RECs on the administrative/leadership team. In 1991 approximately 50% of schools had an REC

on this team, and in 1999 the figure was 75%. The overwhelming majority of RECs interviewed argued it was essential for the RECs to be on such teams. This grew out of concerns relating to leadership and the belief that the REC's role was an important leadership role and as such should be recognised:

> Well, it should be quite clearly made explicit that the REC is one of the most important members of a position of leadership in the school, and that the REC should be on the administration team (K).

Another argument put forward by RECs was that if schools decided that the REC was not part of that structure, there was a serious issue in relationship to the Catholic nature of those schools:

> So the leadership team, I feel, is a crucial place for the REC. If you haven't got it there, then really you've got to almost challenge the existence of the Catholic school… It is that important (Q).

In addition, another REC argued that the membership of the RECs on these teams was not to be a "token membership". If the position was not viewed seriously then "people aren't going to apply". Individual RECs felt that their leadership role was not treated seriously, but because the school needed to have a person in the role to keep up the image of the Catholic school, the REC had a place on the team. Although some RECs were adamant that they should be on administrative/leadership teams, there were some reservations raised by others. There was a fear expressed that being on these teams may lead to additional administrative work that was outside their current role:

> I don't mind the greater kudos of first assistant to the Principal, but as far as [I'm concerned] I don't want my time to be taken up with extras and discipline and all of those sorts of things that, at least in my school, is the role of the DP (A).

Another argued that to be separate from that structure gave the person in that role a greater scope to play a different role:

> Because I think sometimes to be free of all that [admin], you can be more of a prophet figure in a school (I).

There was also a sense from one REC that the RECs leadership role was not taken seriously by administrators because "if you've only been an REC, you're

not in the running for a deputy's job. So it leads nowhere. So people are going to avoid it and they're going to go to where there's a career path, and they're going to go into level coordination" (L).

A further argument suggested that on the school administrative team you needed people appointed according to skills, rather than as ex officio members because they were RECs:

> [From] some of my own reading in terms of management structures and that, one of the things I've read, which I think is very good, is that when organisations come to put people in administration, rather than put people in the administration team, according to their roles, you put people into the administration team according to the skills they have (P).

Furthermore, others referred to working arrangements where they had full access to the Principal and the administrative team whenever they liked. Under these conditions there was no particular reason to be a formal part of that structure of the school. They could achieve what they wanted outside that structure, and this freed them from some of the extra work that would be involved as a member of the team:

> Well, I don't really know what it is to be on admin. I know that I have access to the Principal and the deputy whenever [I need to] (O).

Summary

The major finding in this section was that the role is far too big for one person to manage. There was an overwhelming sense from RECs that the dimensions of the role were too large. Importantly, the historical data presented in Chapter Four and the analysis of research into RECs in Chapter Six fully support the RECs' views that the role, as it currently functions in schools, is not working. Past strategies, such as appointing Assistant RECs, and the current strategy of splitting the REC role into REC and FDC, do not appear to have made a significant difference on the high turnover rates of RECs. Interwoven through these structural arrangements is the lack of clarity, in the minds of some RECs and school authorities, about the nature and purpose of religious education in school settings. The division between REC and FDC indicates a lack of theoretical understanding of religious education, as well as a lack of understanding of the role of REC. Of concern is the experience of RECs who argued that their role was not recognised as a significant leadership role within the

school. Many felt that in terms of professional enhancement the REC role was not taken seriously, and that in the eyes of school authorities the role did not provide an appropriate grounding for Principalship.

It is clear from the evidence presented here that the nature of the role of the REC in Catholic secondary schools would benefit from restructuring. Structural changes should be based upon a sound theoretical understanding of religious education and balance the concerns of local schools and the CEOM, and well as the experience of RECs.

8.3 Category 3 findings (continued): the perceived status of the role

When RECs spoke about the status of the role of the REC, two aspects emerged in the data that need clarification before proceeding with the presentation of findings. Status, in the minds of those interviewed, related to the place that the role had in the school, often in relation to other coordinators of Key Learning Areas and in relation to Deputy Principals and Principals. The comments made about status did not imply the gaining of personal advantage and prestige. Rather status was presented in terms of whether the school community valued the position of REC and what level of importance schools gave it. RECs were arguing for the status of the REC to be reflected within the structure of the school. The status that the RECs were asking for was recognition that the REC position was a central one in the school. It should be accorded a status in the eyes of the total school community that reflected its essential nature within the Catholic school.

The status of the REC in Catholic secondary schools

In one RECs mind, the status of the REC was a test of the school's support for religious education:

> …it [religious education] has to be seen as being a necessity if you want to keep a Catholic school going, otherwise what makes this structure of staff different from the secondary college down the road?…and even in terms of staff and everything, it can't just be the leftovers all the time (L)

Some RECs argued that status was dependent upon a number of factors such as "the personalities in the [leadership] team" (A). In particular it "depended very much on the Principal and the climate and culture of the school" (W). The role of the Principal in arguing for and supporting the role of the REC was critical for many RECs when they reflected on the status that the role had in their particular school. Because the role was important:

> …schools should really recognise that RECs are important to schools… They need to be on leadership teams… There needs to be recognition among schools that they are important people (B).

Whether the status needs to be structurally recognised by giving the role the level of a Deputy Principal, as in other dioceses, was debated:

> I think somebody, whether it be the REC or Faith Development person, needs to be in an executive role. They don't necessarily need to be Deputy Principal, but they need to have an executive role… But I think practically they do need to be, that the executive does need a person that brings to the discussion those significant issues (E).

Most RECs argued that the REC role, and the way in which religious education was undertaken, had a critical influence on the Catholic ethos and identity of the school. They further argued that this was the primary responsibility of the Catholic school system and the Principal, and that their role was a delegated leadership role. While religious education was not the only way in which the ethos of the school was enhanced, religious education was an integral component. Nevertheless, they had such a strong personal and professional commitment to the integral role of the REC in working towards these goals that when they were not supported, they questioned their status within the school.

Relationship of RECs to other leaders in the school

Curriculum in Victorian secondary schools is divided into eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs): English, Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and the Environment, Arts, Technology, Health and Physical Education, and Languages other than English. In Catholic schools religious education is an additional KLA. The normal arrangement in schools is for each KLA to be led by a coordinator for that area, as it is with religious education. In assessing the status of their position in

schools, RECs often compared their coordination role with these other KLA coordinators. Those interviewed drew a link between the importance of religious education and the status of the role of the RECs in comparison with the other curriculum heads. They argued that, at a minimum, to ensure that the religious education program was supported, the REC should be at least "on the same par as any head of any learning area" (A) as regards payment, time release and status within the school.

Another REC argued from a different perspective and suggested that religious education had to "stand apart" (T) from other subjects and structures. Another supported this:

> …because it [religious education] was the reason for the Catholic school's existence … the recognition that if this is a Catholic school, then RE is the most important subject, and everything else … instead of RE being the one that has to tack onto everything else (J).

In Section 8.2 of this thesis RECs asserted the claim that it was essential to the exercising of their role that they be members of the school administrative/leadership teams. This was because of the centrality of religious education in the Catholic identity of the school. The composition of these teams was the decision of the Principal. There was no central directive that schools had to follow in terms of structure or composition of the administrative/leadership team. The majority of schools now have RECs on these teams and their presence on the team was seen to add considerably to the increased status of the REC's role. One REC had contrasting experiences in different schools. In one, she argued, there was high-level recognition and support for the role:

> In this school, right from the very beginning, the REC was a member of the administration team… I am consulted as part of the administration team, so I suppose the position of RE coordinator is considered to be much more important then it once was (A).

The experience in the other school was vastly different:

> The REC wasn't part of the leadership team or the administration … almost stipulating that the REC wasn't really an important person on the team (A)

This person's experience suggests that the role of the REC and the support given, or not given as the case may be, did not depend upon the skills and qualifications that the person brought to the role. What was crucial in this experience was the priority that one Principal placed on the role and the lack of priority placed by the other Principal. Such experiences suggest that there is a necessity to have the CEOM mandate the status of the role for all schools.

Another REC believed so strongly in the necessity for RECs to be on these teams that he said he would not apply for any REC position where the role was not recognised by being on the school administration team:

> In fact I probably wouldn't apply for REC positions or Faith Development positions that didn't have that connection [being on the school executive] (G).

A number of RECs also articulated a link between the status of the role and promotional possibilities, particularly to the level of Principal. As indicated in Section 4.3, the number of female and male Principals who have come from the background of an REC role has been quite small, and most of them have been from religious orders. Lay Principals with a background as RECs are considerably fewer. RECs expressed a knowledge of this situation and claimed that the REC role should be a legitimate stepping-stone to Principal level for those seeking promotion. However, their experience with job applications was that people holding other roles within the school, such as Year Level Coordinators, Curriculum Coordinators and Deputy Principals, were appointed to the Principal level far more than RECs. They concluded that this was a clear indication that the role of REC was of low status in the minds of the members of selection panels. Other RECs associated the status of the RECs with the number of RECs who have moved into Principal's roles in schools:

> One thing that probably does concern me is when we look at the weight of some people who go into Principal positions – they seem to be drawing higher ratios of curriculum roles rather than RE roles. Now my question to that would be what sort of people are we putting in RE roles that are preventing them from being viewed as overall educators with something to offer? … So who are moving into the leadership positions and what's it saying about the nature of how our Catholic schools will go? (F).

Perceived status of the RECs by other members of the school community

Also exercising the mind of the RECs was the perceived status of the RECs in the minds of other members of the school community. In particular, they raised the issue of parental perceptions of the importance of the role:

> As far as curriculum goes, in particular RE, within the school I suppose the status is recognised … but as far as the general school community parent-wise, I don't really think it really enters their way of thinking (B).

Some also questioned whether the entire school structure and the general teaching staff placed much value on religious education and the role of the REC:

> …in some schools the culture is such that – and the culture often created from the Principal down is such that – the religious dimension doesn't come into it, so therefore their [REC's] role is frustrated in many ways (E).

At one point in one interview the researcher asked: "Do you think RECs are valued enough in schools?" The response was a quick, sure and defiant "No" (B). The statement was more than a comment on her own situation; it was a comment drawn from her dealings with other RECs as well. Not being valued was a very strong cause of many individuals leaving the role, and twelve months after her interview with the researcher, this REC resigned from her role and returned to general teaching duties.

These negative experiences of lack of support, however, were not universal. There was an equally strong recollection of positive experiences of support from the Principal. RECs pointed out that one of the joys of the role was "working with very supportive Principals that value what I have done" (A). Drawing on experience with three Principals, one REC pointed out that:

> Principals have been enormously supportive of what I've been trying to do in schools. I've only worked under three Principals, but in all cases they have been supportive of what I've been doing without necessarily giving that much direction (I).

But despite this experience, this same REC felt at times that religious education and the role of the REC was not what she would expect. "Sometimes there was a sense that perhaps what you were doing was seen to be sort of secondary level stuff" (I).

Summary

The analysis of research into RECs presented in Chapter Four found that the issue of status was an important one for RECs. The findings indicated that many RECS questioned whether the role had the status that it should have in Catholic schools. Although the experience of the RECs was mixed in this matter, there was a serious undercurrent of concern that dominated the findings. Support from the school, and in particular the Principal, were critical determinants in the status that the REC role was given.

8.4 Category 4 findings: perceived skills and attributes

Discussions with the RECs about their role brought into focus the issue of the desired qualities, skills and attributes that the REC would need in order to be effective in the role. In these discussions very little was said by RECs about ways in which they would determine if they were effective or not. However, their comments assumed that there was a common understanding of criteria for effectiveness. Nevertheless, they were quite explicit and forthright in their articulation of the range of qualities that an REC would need in order to be effective. The key skills and attributes are outlined in the remainder of this chapter.

The importance of professional qualifications in religious education/theology

Unanimous and unambiguous statements were made by RECs that to fulfil the role effectively the person needed to be an experienced teacher of religious education and to possess specialist qualifications in religious education. The CEOM data (Figures 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13) indicated that more and more RECs are gaining specialist qualifications in religious education and theology and that their general experience as religious educators in very high. Yet there was still a high percentage who did not have specialist qualifications other than their basic degree in education. A number of RECs said that when they commenced in the role they did not have the same depth of training in religious education that they had in their other academic disciplines; "I was always very much aware that I didn't have the [same] training as a teacher of RE as I did have as a teacher of English" (A). The desire to be

more competent in the role led another to do more study: "so I wanted to study so I knew my material" (C).

The formal study of religious education at tertiary level provided a number of RECs with a confidence in the subject matter they would not have had otherwise: "So by my second year out I was doing a Graduate Diploma in Religious Education… And I learned a great deal, it gave me a lot of confidence to offer something in the formal RE classroom and beyond" (F). Another REC expressed the benefits of specialist qualifications in a similar way: "it gives you a sense of confidence and also a framework from which to work" (G). The following extract from one of the interviews highlights the importance of qualifications for this REC:

> *Q. How has that theoretical study that you've done in your Graduate Diploma in Religious Education …ped you cope with being an RE coordinator? Do you think you could do it without that sort of background?*
>
> A. Oh, my God, no. I wouldn't have had a clue. I wouldn't have known any of it. And I think you have to be doing it …
> if you're going to be an REC, you've either got to keep studying, all the time – something … you've got to know what you're on about (L).

RECs noted that the qualifications of all teachers of religious education was an important issue, and this will be treated in greater depth in Chapter Nine. Many RECs reported that their experience was that some of the religious education teachers were not qualified:

> And in a lot of places I've worked at they've had the view that … used it [religious education] up to make the load… Now from an educational point of view, I found that quite abhorrent in the sense that, one unqualified; two, inexperienced; three, we're just using you for the sake of using you (D).

Another argued that:

> I think even for teachers who are teaching RE in the classroom, I think it's like any other discipline, that you should have qualifications in it. And you should have specialist RE teachers, just like you have specialist Maths and English teachers (P).

The issue of religious education specialists was raised on a number of occasions. The argument stemmed from not having religious education teachers who were sufficiently qualified to teach in this area. One proposal, often raised, was that the religious education faculty should be like other faculties in the school and have only appropriately qualified people in the religious education classroom:

> So then you get to the debate about do you go to a more specialised RE department or not… But certainly the two issues with staff in terms of inexperience, in terms of lack of academic background in the subject, and in terms of their load in the subject, and so therefore their lack of engagement in the RE faculty as such are major problems (E)

Personal attributes

While not a professional qualification, some RECs also noted that another type of qualification, perhaps more correctly called a personal attribute, was required for both RECs and religious education teachers: "I think they have to be people of faith themselves" (P). Another expressed it in this way: "I think some demonstration of personal spiritual development is important, and then a whole heap of other things like their competence as teachers" (F). This was not in opposition to academic qualifications but a co-requisite:

> From a faith or spiritual point of view I think you have to have people who obviously are committed to the faith. Unlike a lot of the other subjects in a school, I don't think that you can just put someone in, because the teaching of RE is multi-dimensional. There's the instructional part, there's the faith development part, there can be the evangelical part if you like (D).

RECs saw as one of their tasks the asking of questions about meaning, that were interpreted by staff to be faith questions. The assumption was that RECs had to be people of faith themselves. One described this dimension of the role thus: "I don't think it should be seen as a career step, you have to be almost like a vocation, you have to be called, to want to lead in religious activity" (H). The REC should be "able to demonstrate a faith commitment" (H). Furthermore, they should be people who lead and challenge in a prophetic sense:

So to me the major prerequisite for an REC, if they're going to take on a predominant role in the school, is to really have a strong, a prophetic sense of the mission of the school in terms of its faith and religious dimension, and to be able to bring that to bear, effectively. (E)

Necessary skills

A notion related to that of specialist religious education was that RECs recognised it as essential that they must be good teachers themselves. RECs suggested that as well as being able to teach the religious education curriculum they needed to be capable of teaching other subjects as well. Teaching in areas outside the discipline of religious education could demonstrate to staff that you were skilled as a teacher:

Also I think it makes it legitimate that I don't teach only RE, or that I'm not only the REC, I like to do either English or SOSE (O)

One of the benefits of teaching across curriculum areas was that it also provided an overview of the school that was important for the leadership role of the REC:

All the little things you can do outside of POL[10] that give you a groundwork like an overview of the school, because I think that REC and Faith Development have to have that (F).

There were also particular leadership skills that RECs needed to be able to bring to the role. The first level of leadership related to working with the religious education faculty in the school and being able to lead the religious education teachers:

So if you're coming in as an REC, you know your content, you know your process, you get to know your teachers so you can develop your role from there (C).

In some cases, too, there were staff who had been RECs and were now just members of the faculty and you had to be able to lead them:

I know when I first came, in one of the year levels, I was the new REC, and of the six teachers that were in that team, three of them were ex-RECs at this school. So I felt like the old captain that was suddenly thrust into the role of coach with a couple of other people there watching closely (B).

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[10] POL stands for Position of Leadership. It is a designated position within the school that attracts time release and additional salary.

Then there was the skill of being able to articulate the vision of the school and to keep that as the forefront of teacher's minds:

> You can get bogged down in practicalities, so I think you need a wider vision, and you need to be a person that can keep that wider vision bubbling underneath everything that you're doing (E).

A challenge for the REC leader was not to become caught up in the system, but to be able to stand aside from it and be a voice of challenge:

> …. because the RECs have gone onto executives, and taken up POL positions, and they have all of this technical stuff, and fancy job descriptions have been written, and all that sort of stuff, you can kind of get lost a little bit in terms of the REC… They do need to have a sense of the culture of the place, and understand whether the culture of the place is appropriate or not. And so they do need to perhaps challenge the predominance of the sports program or challenge the money that's being spent on an overseas trip when there's students in the place that are struggling for school uniforms (E)

<u>Summary</u>

RECs were united in their assessment that specialist qualifications in religious education and/or theology were essential for individuals undertaking the role. These were necessary so that they were in a better position to assist religious education teachers and better able to construct religious education curriculum for the classroom. Over and above that, the qualifications were deemed to be essential because the role itself demanded them. The role was a senior role, and an important leadership role, and the individual in that role needed to be a specialist in the area of religious education. Data from the CEOM (Figures 4.8 and 4.9) pointed to the trend that more and more RECs have these specialist qualifications. Nevertheless, some RECs are appointed without these qualifications.

The desired attributes of RECs included personal and professional elements. It was stated as desirable that the REC, as well as possessing academic qualifications in religious education, also needed to be a person of faith. The position of REC included more than the educational component, and the individual needed to possess qualities in both the professional domain and the faith domain.

8.5 Category 4 findings (continued): the role of the CEOM

The CEOM has been a strong positive influence and strong support in the development of religious education and the role of the REC in Catholic secondary schools. The major influence of and support by the CEOM has occurred through the following avenues: the development of the *Guidelines for Religious Education* (1973, 1984, 1995); the provision of centralised professional development for religious education teachers and for RECs; the organisation of annual RECs Conferences; the supplying of personnel from the CEOM in direct support of the RECs in schools and the managing of the RECs networks; the sponsorship of study leave for religious education teachers and RECs; and RECs' newsletters.

The role of the CEOM in supporting RECs.

Support from the CEOM was cited as essential by the RECs, who recognised that the CEOM have "got their finger on the pulse in terms of Catholic education, are providing a means of being able to disseminate information and learning and teaching skills" (F). Another REC said they "would not have been able to survive without the support of the CEO" (M).

RECs found particularly strong support in the networks. Originally these networks emerged from the needs and actions of RECs themselves. At the 1984 REC conference, RECs came to the conclusion that just meeting annually was not sufficient and that more regular meetings were important in the ongoing development and mutual support of the RECs. A number of RECs volunteered to host meetings of informal groupings of RECs on a regular basis. These meetings were held after school hours and covered a wide variety of topics. From this loose arrangement a more formal structure gradually emerged, and the organisation and management of this was taken over by CEOM personnel who had expertise in religious education. Eventually eight geographical networks emerged throughout the Archdiocese to cater for approximately 70 secondary schools. Although there was no uniform pattern to the way the networks operated, the general structure was that these networks met each term and were chaired by a representative of the religious education team from the CEOM.

One of the RECs interviewed was working at the CEOM in the role of education officer at the time of the formation of these networks. This REC was responsible for chairing meetings and for general organisational tasks and recalled the historical importance of these networks and the reasons for their establishment:

> Maybe RE was one of the first things that did get into this whole idea of people networking and sharing ideas and that sort of spread into other faculty areas now. It certainly just came out of the need of people who were involved (P).

RECs found their networks to be beneficial because "the RE network in our region has been an important feature too of support and tapping into new ideas" (K), even though at times there was a problem "getting there because schools are just so busy" (K).

Another REC who was interviewed worked at the CEOM in the early days of the networks and argued that:

> I was very strong on the CEO people being the support people in terms of the groups [networks] because my experience was that when we tried to share minute taking, typing minutes out, just the organisation nitty-gritty stuff, that it could fall apart fairly quickly (E).

The benefit, apart from whatever information was canvassed at the meeting, was the "support and friendship groups" (A). Being an REC was a "very difficult job" and "constantly demanding", but you could work through it "knowing that you always had that support" (A).

Increased pressures on schools in recent years have had an impact on the network meetings. One REC supported the concept of the networks but pointed to problems in attending them:

> The regional meeting process [networks] – I found it was sort of just another thing to do. I didn't really find it challenging… I think it's a great concept but it didn't work for me personally (I).

The increasing pressure of work at school made it difficult for RECs to attend the network meetings held during the school day. Travel time to the meeting, leaving work behind for students and a host of other demands made the possibility of

attending increasingly difficult: "I try to go as much as possible, and it's sometimes difficult with all the commitments (F). Another stated:

> When people get there they find them highly productive, but
> they still are reluctant to go in the sense of we'll often find
> school matters overtaking them (E).

Overall RECs were supportive of the principle of the networks. They had worked well in the past but now there was a need to overhaul the structure to cater for new situations in schools.

The importance of REC conferences in the ongoing development of the role was stated many times by RECs. Since the 1970s the CEOM has organised annual RECs conferences. These were of two to three days duration and featured guest speakers speaking on contemporary issues in religious education. Workshops were offered on a range of topics and there was time set aside for less formal interactions and discussions between RECs. RECs were overwhelming in their praise for these annual RECs conferences, saying, "I think the conferences were fantastic" and provided the opportunity to "see that there were lots of different ways of doing it [religious education]" (Q). Another said, "I live for those two days, because they always have good keynote speakers" and pointed to the benefits of "seeing everyone else who does the same thing as you" (J). Similarly, another said that you hear and meet "high quality people to share ideas and put that ideal out in front of us again" (I).

Notwithstanding the level of praise that RECs had for the CEOM, particularly in their organising of the networks and conferences, many RECs spoke with disappointment about the changes in personnel at the CEOM since the late 1990s and the impact that was having on them. In the mid-1980s, at the time of the writing and implementation of the 1984 *Guidelines*, a number of specialist and experienced religious educators, with lengthy previous experience as RECs, were appointed to the Secondary Religious Education Team at the CEOM. The number in this team was usually six. Their work was entirely with secondary religious education teachers and with RECs. In 1996, when Archbishop George Pell was installed in Melbourne, he appointed a Vicar for Religious Education outside the structure of the CEOM. Two things happened at the CEOM as a consequence of that dual arrangement. Those people whose work was entirely directed towards religious

education were then given other major areas of responsibility and thus had less time to allocate for supporting RECs in schools. Furthermore, as staff with secondary experience in religious education left the CEOM for other employment they were not replaced. The consequences were that CEOM-level support of religious education in schools significantly diminished. The secondary religious education staff decreased from six in 1995 to one in 2001. It was developments such as these that the RECs commented on as being very disappointing and that left them without familiar support mechanisms. As one REC stated:

> …there's no doubt that as the number of people has dropped,
> the kind of thing they can do for us has changed (O).

In particular for this REC, the RECs newsletter containing notices about professional development, conferences, journal articles and so on had now become so poor that "I binned it, because it's not even worth passing around to my staff" (O). Another regretted that because of the changed conditions "there's been a great limitation on what they can do" (K), to the extent that another REC said that the CEOM "support for RE people and staff I think has reached pathetic levels" (H).

Summary

The important role that the CEOM has played in the development and support of religious education and the REC has been of enormous significance. The three major areas of support from the CEOM – general professional development and support, the contribution to the running of networks, and the organisation of the annual RECs' Conference – were seen by RECs as critical to their ongoing development. The annual conference was still meeting the needs of the RECs. However, there were concerns expressed about the operation of the networks. These concerns ranged from pressures in schools that made attendance at these networks difficult, to the diminishing number of CEOM personnel to run them. The severe decline in the number of specialist secondary religious education personnel that coincided with the establishment of the Office of the Episcopal Vicar for Religious Education was lamented by the vast majority of RECs. RECs wanted a return to the previous arrangements at the CEOM where there was far more centralised support for them in their role.

8.6 Analysis of findings about the perceived nature of the role of REC

The difficulty of the role

In their interviews RECs outlined the major components of their work: the formal religious education curriculum; the liturgical, prayer and retreat life; the role as key leader in the promotion of the Catholic nature of the school. Each one of these components was complex and demanding and there were severe difficulties in effectively carrying out the role.

The difficulty of the REC role was also raised in previous research. McCourt (1981) found the role of the REC was difficult, essentially because of its diversity. There was so much to do that there was always a sense that it could not be done. Both the work with religious education curriculum and the work outside the classroom were overwhelming. Added to that the leadership component of the role resulted in more demands on the person in the role. The CEOM described the complexity of the dimensions of religious education and of the role of the REC. In 1984 they released their policy on religious education in the senior years of schooling (Figure 4.1) and the breadth and complexity religious education were made explicit. Furthermore, in 1995, as a segment of the *Guidelines* the CEOM detailed job descriptions under three headings: formation, curriculum and administration (Appendix 1). The lists of tasks under each heading indicate the enormous breadth of the role and it would appear impossible for all these to be effectively undertaken. Slattery (1989) researched the specific area of the responsibilities of RECs and the duties of other subject heads. He concluded that the REC role was much broader than the other roles in that it had responsibility for the total curriculum, pastoral care, liturgy, retreats and parental education. The REC role was immeasurably different and more complex from other subject coordination roles. Most recently, Rymarz (1997a) researched the role and also concluded that it was enormously complex and that the demands this made on individuals should not be underestimated.

There have been a number of responses to these demands of the role. One response has resulted in some structural changes within schools. In the most recent attempt, schools have divided the role into REC/FDC in order to help overcome the workload difficulty. RECs commenting on this approach were forthright in stating

that this was an organisational response to the pressures of the role and that under no circumstances was it envisaged that religious education role and faith development role would be separated, even though schools had done this. In schools in the 1970s and 1980s it was common that there would be an assistant REC or members of staff responsible for religious education at year levels. This practice was also a method of dispersing the workload. But it was not successful enough so the new approach of two senior positions has been adopted.

Some RECs recommended a possible solution to the problem. They suggested that role descriptions and conditions should be established centrally by the CEOM. The debate over the merits of a centralised approach has also been raised in research contexts. While working at the CEO is Brisbane, Black (1986), undertook research into the role of the REC, in particular RECs perceptions of the role. Black was part of the team responsible for the writing of the role description for RECs that was applicable in that diocese. Based on her research she insisted that any centralised policy in relation to RECs which included a role description would only be effective if it incorporated the perceptions of the RECs in schools.

Later research by Slattery (1989) in the Diocese of Broken Bay also included a discussion of the relative strengths of centralised role descriptions and local descriptions. Slattery opted for the decisions about the role to be made at the local school level because schools are more attuned to the variables of the local context and could adapt the role to suit local circumstances.

The findings in this thesis are clear in that they highlight a problem with the current arrangements about the structure of the role. The solutions to those problems are not clear. Solutions rest upon balancing local needs of the school and centralised policies from the CEOM. There needs to be both flexibility and direction that could come from a planned consultative process between schools, RECs and the CEOM.

The most important response to demands of the role has been the high turnover rate of RECs. This will be dealt with extensively in Chapter Nine. However, it needs to be raised briefly in this context as well. CEOM survey data presented in Chapter Four confirmed that this turnover rate has been a constant factor since the mid-1980s. Recent research by Blahut and Bezzina (1998) and Crotty (1998a) has

reported that the turnover rate cannot be sustained. It was clear from the findings of this thesis that the demands of the role were a major contributing factor.

The status of the role

Even more central to RECs' understanding of their role was the issue of status. Status has been an issue that has surfaced in other research, as well as in this thesis. Stuart (1981) examined the status of RECs and concluded that if the REC role was to be more attractive then the role had to be given a clear and positive status with the schools. One key to making the position more attractive was to give more time to the RECs to cope with the demands of the role. In relation to status, Stuart also urged the CEOs to support schools by mandating the status of the role. Yet the historical relationship between schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the CEOM has not encouraged such centralised approaches.

Brandon (1984) spoke of the difference between theoretical status and real status. He found that many RECs had very little real status, even though the theoretical status had been put into school documentation. He argued that the significant factor in the status being real was the obvious and positive support from the Principal. The Principal had to publicly declare the position to be important. Sierakowski (1991) concluded that RECs saw their role as lacking status, and therefore it was very difficult to get staff to apply for the position.

RECs argued that one of the central indicators of lack of status was that their position was not a stepping-stone to promotion. The very small proportion of Principals from an REC background indicated that RECs were not considered appropriate personnel for such a position. RECs argued that if they wanted promotion they needed to pursue other avenues within the school structures, in particular the role of Curriculum Coordinator and/or Deputy Principal. This raised a number of issues. It suggested people appointed to REC positions were not chosen on the basis of skills, qualifications and teaching experience but on qualities such as commitment to faith.

Place of the REC on the leadership/administrative team

RECs were also concerned about their place on school administrative/leadership teams. The skills required for this senior management

position within the structure of the school were demanding. If the RECs were on these teams this presumably indicated the high status of the role, not just operational tokenism. CEOM data indicated that increasingly schools have placed RECs on these teams. This recognised two things: the skill of the person of the REC and recognition of the importance of the position itself. The vast majority of RECs interviewed argued that it was essential for them to be represented on the team; and in schools where this was not the case, they questioned what this was saying about religious education and the role of the REC. Related to this was the experience of some RECs that in terms of time to do the job and payment for the position, they were perceived to be the same as all other subject coordinators. Many RECs argued that their role was far more demanding than other coordinating roles and should be designated a Deputy Principal position. It was also more central to their vision of the mission of the Catholic school and should be visibly supported as such.

Researchers have also raised concerns about the suitability of RECs to carry out these functions, and others, within the school context. Malone (1982) pointed out that in the early years of the role (early 1970s) many RECs were inexperienced and had an insufficient understanding of religious education. Brandon (1984) analysed a survey of religious education teachers and found that a significant number of RECs did not have an adequate grasp of religious education curriculum and were not capable of giving the leadership in religious education curriculum that was required. More recently, the work of D'Orsa & D'Orsa (1997), and D'Orsa (1998) posed a challenge to all RECs. They argued that while RECs are critical leaders in their schools, they must resist being marginalised as people who are only skilled in religious education. RECs need to be competent in all education, technical and human domains. If they are to be the leaders that schools need, RECs must be competent across a range of areas.

The findings of this thesis indicated that the process of selection of RECs, the criteria for selection, the status of the role and the qualifications of RECs were all factors to be considered if the low retention rate of RECs was to be successfully addressed. In addition, the challenges to the role that are outlined in Chapter Nine of this thesis also need to be addressed as part of the solution.

Chapter Nine

Findings on challenges faced by RECs

9.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the fifth and final category of findings in the empirical component of this thesis: the challenges faced by RECs in their role. It presents these findings under four sections: personal challenges; the challenges involved in the religious education curriculum and in leading the team of religious education teachers responsible for teaching that curriculum; challenges from the broader school community, including general staff, students and their families; and the challenge to balance the professional responsibility of the RECs' role to support the Catholic church with their personal views on the Catholic church.

The major challenge expressed by RECs was to maintain their personal strength and professional commitment to the role under enormous pressure. All the RECs interviewed commented on the very high personal demands that were made on them in the role because of the size of the task and the way in which other members of the school community often viewed religious education. As shown in the previous chapter, one response to the size of the task was for schools to divide the role into REC and FDC. Nevertheless, the overwhelming comment still was that the role was more stressful than any other head of curriculum in the school:

> I know all jobs are stressful but in particular I think teaching
> RE and teaching in some schools in Australia (G).

A consequence of the stress was what RECs called the 'burnout' factor, where RECs simply said they reached a stage where they had had enough and they left the role. Burnout and other issues are explored in the rest of this chapter.

9.2 Category 5 findings: Personal challenges in the role of REC

In one sense all of the challenges encountered by RECs could be classified as personal, in that they all affected the person. However, 'personal' here relates specifically to how RECs cope on a personal level with the overall demands of the role.

<u>The challenge to avoid burnout</u>

When commenting on the general demands of the role a number of factors were raised by the RECs. The first was the issue of 'burnout'. This was the common language term used by RECs to refer to the continual drain on their professional and personal lives and the toll that this takes on them.

One REC admitted that she was "suffering burnout" because she had tried "to be all things to all people" (A). Another realised that burnout had been a factor in resigning from the role in one school and then years later taking on the role in another school. This REC was later told by a member of the administration team in her first role that the burnout occurred because of lack of real support from the leadership team in the school (C).

Another factor that RECs articulated as a cause of burnout was the constant public nature of the role. Generally RECs reported that they had to put themselves on the line (Q) with such things as school liturgies, feast days, retreats etc. RECs felt that they were on public show and under public scrutiny many times during the year, more so than any other coordinator in the school. In short, the major causes of burnout identified by the RECs were the size of the role, the lack of time to do the role and the lack of support they had in the role.

A major cause of burnout was the size of the role and the amount of work that was involved. RECs raised the issue that their workload was treated identically to other subject coordinators. Many RECS stated that they were given the same allocation of time as other subject coordinators, yet the role was more complex. For example, RECs compared their role with other subject coordinators, particularly in relationship to coordination of English. As all students undertake both English and religious education, the number of teachers in these subject areas was approximately the same. Also the number of administrative functions (reports, meetings, organising professional development, curriculum review) is similar. However, RECs argued that the classroom religious education curriculum was only one aspect of their work. There were many other demanding aspects, and one REC gave a sketch of all the tasks that are undertaken in the role:

You've got to be a liturgist. You're a curriculum adviser. You've got to be a deeply spiritual, meditative, reflective, prayerful person. You've got to be an extraordinary administration assistant. You've got to have exceptional organisational skills and good communication. That is hard work and I'm not sure that enough recognition is given to that (U).

The size of the REC role was also compared to the size of the role of other subject coordinators:

RECs have a bigger job. It's a faculty as big as English, but the job is twice as hard when the personnel aren't qualified (F).

Part of the difficulty with the size of the role was the perception, expressed by many RECs, that not enough staff shared the responsibility of religious education across the total school. The experience of being overwhelmed by the task was often mentioned:

And I think somehow the expectation that the RE dimension of the school is the responsibility of the whole staff and the whole school community, that in fact, it's the core somehow to create a culture in a school that says 'this is right at the core of everything we do' (I).

Closely connected to the size of the role as a critical factor in burnout was the lack of time that schools allocated for the role. Once again, RECs expressed this in terms of what the REC received as opposed to what other coordinators received:

I think probably first of all the person doing it needs time … that it's not along with six other subjects they're teaching or whatever else they're doing in the school, that they're really given a lot of time (I).

In particular, one REC made an explicit link between time allocated for the role and the burnout and turnover of people in the role:

Time is pretty crucial. I think that burnout for RECs – you're probably aware, the average life span is about 18 months or something like that. I understand why. It's because it's a tough role and there's just so much to organise and not to mention your teaching as well (G).

The third element that gave rise to burnout was the lack of support that some RECs experienced in the role. In some cases RECs found that the school Principal had other agendas that were considered more important. They felt they did not have the necessary support from the Principal:

> I'll be very blunt: Principals are there to get bums on seats, and if you've got your Info Technology, if you've got the VET program, if you've got, like we have, a Year 10 alternative program, if you're successful in sports and you've got your sports and management VET program, people will come. But if you ask them about Religious Education, well, oh yeh, it just comes as an addendum. Now the REC has to carry the brunt, I believe these days anyhow – not so much in the early days, there was a support structure – but these days they've got to carry the brunt of the Catholicity of the school. They've got to make sure that it happens in the school, and they answer to the Principal over that. You set your goals, and then they're evaluated (C).

In addition, this REC believed that the skills of RECs were not recognised:

> But I suspect too that Principals, and I know other staff, often don't recognise the sorts of skills that an REC has. They're recognised in the curriculum coordinator, they are recognised in the daily organiser, but people fail to see that a lot of the skills of the curriculum coordinator and the daily organiser are skills that an REC works with all the time (U).

Challenges to RECs to support their own faith life

A further challenge felt by a range of RECs was in the area of supporting their own faith life as well as the faith life of the school community (students and staff). The faith life referred to was not so much a personal commitment to the practices of the Catholic Church, such as attendance at Sunday Mass. Rather, it was a more internal factor akin to "filling up the batteries" (I). RECs were talking about the spirituality they needed from which they would gain inner strength to continue to be effective in the religious education domain:

> And part of that I think was because it's very difficult to find support for that side of your life… And it's not a support in terms of even just getting feedback on what's happening, but finding a place and a way of sustaining your own sort of faith life and remaining creative and energetic towards it yourself (I).

The overall demands of the role felt by RECs were not just academic or related to religious education curriculum. Part of the expectations that RECs had about their role was that they were to support staff in their faith and personal lives. This placed considerable pastoral demands on them:

> But for me that's one of the biggest issues within schools in this area … how do you support and nurture the people who are pouring out all that stuff to the school community? (I).

An integral part of the REC role was engaging in the faith and life issues that confronted all staff. There was an expectation that RECs should and can be of help. Many tasks become part of their role that were never written in role descriptions:

> I think it is a grinding job, especially looking at teachers who are struggling with their own faith dimensions in their lives – there might be deaths within the close family, their own faith growth. Even though it's not part of the written down job description, it lands on you (G).

Some RECs also described the experience of the role as being isolated from the rest of the staff. This grew out of a sense that the REC was someone who defended the faith, and stood up and argued for the Church: "you are almost defending your own faith in your own religious school" (J). There was a sense that "in RE your own being is on the line when you walk into that classroom" (H) and this was "multiplied by the impact of all the other teachers" (H) seeking assistance from you in justifying what was occurring in the religious education curriculum. There was a sense, too, that in the role you had to "live up to the values of the Gospel" (H) that were espoused in the school and that in the role you were the custodian of those values. It was this drain upon the person that RECs linked to burnout and the unreasonable demands of the role and why the turnover rate among RECs was high:

> You are drawing on your own spirituality, the depths of your own being, and you can't keep doing that. And it's such a busy job you don't have a lot of time for personal space and quiet reflection and prayer, and I think that really wears you down (K).

This REC expressed the need to "take a sabbatical somewhere" to overcome "the drain on your inner spiritual reserves" (K). Another saw it as important to "nourish the self" and expressed the view that he would stay in the role for three years and then be "ready to take a less active position" because you wear out in the role because of the personal demands (R). One REC stated that her energy had run out and she had to take a break from the role:

> I think that is why I stopped it because I was running out of that enthusiasm and energy. A big commitment to my personal faith. The energy to share my commitment with others in that area. All of those things (T).

Summary

In summary, the personal challenges that were faced by RECs were interwoven with the way RECs perceived their role and the structural arrangements for the role in the schools. RECs pointed to the structural issues of the size of the role, as well as the inbuilt expectation that they had to do it all themselves. Added to this was the view held by many RECs that religious education and the role of the REC were not adequately supported within schools. These varied challenges often resulted in what RECs called 'burnout', which then resulted in the high turnover rate among RECs.

One remedy suggested by RECs was that they needed to attend to their inner life and take time out in order to cope. While the development of individual strategies to cope with challenges of the role is commendable, it does not address the core issue and does not provide a solution for what has been a significant issue for RECs since the mid-1970s. Structural problems of time allocation, size of the role and support issues are primarily the responsibility of the schools. There is, however, nothing prohibiting Principals from establishing the REC position as a central one and giving the position all the structural support that the role needs. Furthermore, the challenges that RECs identified as most strenuous were those surrounding the faith dimension of their role, with staff and students.

9.3 Category 5 findings (continued): Challenges working with staff, students and familites

Challenges dealing with staff

The most spoken about challenge faced by RECs, and the one that caused them the greatest concern, was their dealings with staff, in particular the teachers of religious education for whom the RECs were ultimately responsible. Some RECs mentioned that on occasions the general staff presented them with some difficulties as well:

> Some staff discount the whole thing of faith or RE in the school because they're people who obviously have either not been exposed to the fantastic sense, or the fantastic things that the church has to offer, and it's not part of their reality, not part of their meaning-making as well (G).

In relation to religious education teachers, there were a range of issues that RECs referred to, from the managerial to the structural. One of the situations that RECs had to deal with was that religious education teachers would regularly come to them for assistance in the preparation of the religious education curriculum. On the surface that seemed most appropriate and desirable for RECs in their role as coordinator, senior teacher and mentor. Rather than a positive situation, however, the RECs often spoke of this in negative terms because they saw it as over-reliance and a lack of professionalism on the part of the religious education teacher. This over-reliance placed demands on the REC that were greater than that of other subject coordinators:

> But even so people expect the REC to provide them with materials in a way that they don't expect of other faculty heads. Some people expect you to give them absolutely everything, and it just becomes a bit wearing after a long time. The lack of personal initiative in finding ways to do things for yourself – I found that over the long term, I've gotten very tired of people acting in that way (K).

The experience of others was that there was an ingrained attitude among some religious education teachers that it was expected that if you were in the role of the coordinator, it would be left to you to do all the work:

> I suppose that the disappointing thing is sometimes you might get some staff who'll say, well, he or she is the REC,

they're being paid for it, they're on a POL 1 or 1.5 or 2 or whatever, it's their job (B).

On the other hand, in some of the larger schools the religious education department was so big that to be of support to individual staff and to have detailed knowledge of what was happening in the religious education faculty was almost impossible:

> But it's very hard to keep track when you have so many people in the faculty. It's hard to know how people are thinking, what they're saying in their classrooms. And I haven't got the time, I have not been given the time, and I do not want the responsibility of having to go in there and police everyone's work (O).

The issue of working with religious education teachers who were over-reliant on the REC for assistance was a dilemma for RECs. Assistance was not the issue for RECs; the issue was over-reliance. Over-reliance meant that from the point of view of the REC the religious education teacher was not carrying out their professional responsibilities. This was compounded by the fact that many of the religious education teachers did not have adequate qualifications in religious education, and for RECs this was one of the biggest issues in schools:

> I reckon that probably the biggest thing is to have people in schools who have got enough background, enough material to go in with to really engage properly with the faith tradition and the students that are sitting in front of them. That's an enormous area (I).

RECs argued that employing appropriate staff who were qualified to teach religious education and knowledgeable and generally supportive of the Catholic dimension of the school was essential. It was a primary function of the Principal to ensure that appropriate procedures were in place. Employment mechanisms and processes in schools needed to reflect a priority to employ qualified religious education staff. Many RECs felt that in some schools there were other priorities:

> You've got an enormous job of resourcing staff chosen by the Principal, who will primarily choose a good business-man/management teacher, who by sheer coincidence can teach RE as well. So they set up the other subjects with the specialists, and then say, "Well, you can teach RE". So you've got an enormous job trying to support these people … you can't do everything (C).

<u>The need to have qualified and committed teachers of religious education</u>

Many issues were raised by RECs in connection with religious education teachers in Catholic schools. These findings were categorised into three groups: the religious education teachers' professional qualifications for teaching religious education; the religious education teachers' willingness to teach religious education; the religious education teachers' support for the faith dimension of religious education. However, others said that in their school "we're very fortunate that we have more people who want to teach religious education than we can give classes to" (K).

The overwhelming comment by RECs was that there were many religious education teachers in Catholic schools who did not have the necessary qualifications to teach religious education in an educationally satisfactory way. There was a general pessimism about this situation as seen in the following statements. One REC commented that when the religious education teachers "do not have the qualifications" they are "really looking for a lot of direction" (A). Another stated that "we now have a whole group of teachers" who "have no grounding and are desperate for grounding" in religious education (C). Yet another commented that "you have an RE meeting and you've got the majority of people who haven't got an RE background" (F). RECs commented that part of the reason for the lack of expertise among religious education teachers was to be found in the employment priorities in schools. Many RECS were of the view that employing specialist teachers in other curriculum areas was given priority over the employment of suitably qualified religious education teachers. In addition, the RECs' experience was that religious education teachers were allocated to religious education after the other curriculum areas were filled:

> Well, to me it's about the fact that we're willing to get all of
> our faculty areas organised and topped up, and then we turn
> around and say, "Of the people that are here now working in
> these faculties, who can teach RE as well?" (I).

For the RECs this approach to staff allocation of teaching responsibilities "challenges us to the core", questioning "what we are really on about" (I). The result was that "we are bringing in people who haven't got the background and skills and

energy for RE" (I). One REC argued that religious education teachers "are suffering from a real lack of confidence and lack of knowledge" (Q). On the other hand, another REC had experienced a change in the mindset of some Principals, who now had become convinced "that having trained RE people on staff is important" (F). This REC knew of "a few schools now who won't employ someone unless they have an RE background" (F). However, the view most commonly held by RECs was that the current priorities of selection and allocation of staff to teach religious education in Catholic schools was not appropriate.

Other RECs reported that some religious education teachers, as well as being unqualified, were teaching religious education but did not want to. One religious education teacher "let me know all year that she hated it" (L). This REC believed that in the religious education faculty you have the greatest number of those who "don't want it" (L). Another REC realised that "some people are doing it reluctantly" (W), and another that "a whole series of new staff have just basically been slotted in and told, 'You've got religious education' " (M). Another REC stated:

> And a lot of people were told, "It's part of your teaching allotment and because you're a homeroom teacher you have to teach religious education". They knew nothing about it and they got a textbook and just worked through that, and it was very unsatisfactory for them and for the kids (P).

The dual problem of not having suitably qualified staff and not having willing staff was a major issue for RECs. They argued that in no other faculty in a Catholic school would there be an equivalent lack of qualifications and lack of interest in the subject area. The major consequence for the RECs was that they were not only expected to coordinate all the various activities in religious education, more than any other coordinator, but were also expected to support the teachers on an ongoing basis. The major consequence for the students was that they were not being taught sufficiently well in a subject area that the school argued was critical and set it apart from other schools.

As outlined in Chapter Seven, RECs delineated six dimensions of religious education. A religious education teacher therefore needed to be able to teach across these dimensions. They needed more than knowledge and qualifications

in religious education. RECs wanted their religious education teachers to be people of faith. One REC pointed to recent graduates from Australian Catholic University:

> I mean, staff will come out of ACU, the younger staff with their bits of paper, but you find the actual faith component itself has slipped to the very lowest level (J).

This raised the question: What does a religious education teacher require? One REC expressed the outer limits of these requirements:

> The minimum that for me would be required of somebody in my faculty would be a commitment to not undermine the Church, the Catholic education system… The optimum level of commitment would be commitment as a practising member of a worshipping community, someone who shares God's vision for the world, and wants to communicate that to kids (U).

RECs lamenting the state of religious education teachers raised the issue of restricting the number of teachers to those who have specialist qualifications. In other curriculum areas the practice of using only specialist teachers was commonplace. Teachers with language qualifications specialise in language and teachers with mathematics qualifications specialise in mathematics. The history of religious education teachers had been significantly different in Catholic secondary schools. In the majority of Catholic schools the position of religious education teacher had been linked to the role of the homeroom teacher. Homeroom teachers had a pastoral responsibility for a class of students at a given year level. Under this model, for every homeroom group you have a religious education teacher. Consequently, the very structure placed an emphasis on pastoral care and not religious education. The primary task of the religious education teacher was not religious education but pastoral care.

One REC spoke of a religious education specialist characteristic, saying "they are confident, they are knowledgeable, and they are focused on religious education" (A). RECs linked specialist qualifications with the capacity to be better teachers of religious education and to significantly change the religious education curriculum:

I think that as the teachers become more knowledgeable and have a much greater depth on [which] draw [in] their own religious knowledge and understanding, that the way we teach it, the courses of study, are much more demanding, that RE is not just sitting around chatting anymore about being nice to each other, it's an intellectual exercise (A).

I just taught a unit on Eucharist with my Year 8's and I don't think I got very far because it's a foreign experience, and you try and make all the links you can… Obviously we had to identify what was the core of what we were passing on anyway and how much that lack of Church experience means… My kids say to me, "I'm not Catholic but…" (Q).

Selection of teaching staff for Catholic schools is one of the essential tasks that the school Principal undertakes. Selection of staff to teach religious education is particularly important given the overall religious dimension of Catholic schools. It needs to be pointed out that the Principal can only select staff from the people that apply. Consequently, the Principal may not receive applications that match the needs of the school. Understanding these restrictions, RECs were in one voice stating strongly that the selection of suitably qualified religious education staff was not occurring. If staff are employed who do not have the desired qualifications then the school needs to have mechanisms in place to support the ongoing professional development of these teachers, and the burden should not rest totally with the REC.

Challenges for the religious education curriculum

General changes in society and changes in the relationship of students with the institutional Church outside of school also presented challenges to RECs in the area of the religious education curriculum. Among these challenges, the necessity to develop multicultural and multi-faith ways of teaching religious education was deemed important. The changing nature of the schools' clientele, from almost exclusively Anglo-Celtic Catholic to incorporating other cultures and faiths, raised questions for RECs in the construction and delivery of their religious education curriculum:

So I like that intercultural blending of spiritualities and ideas, but I really think if we've got a Buddhist, how can we do something to encourage him to develop his own faith? And

the same with Islam. Can we have an inclusive school in
terms of faith? (M).

As well as new students to Catholic schools there was also a change in the religious commitment of students. According to RECs, many of these students are "unchurched', meaning that, apart from their connection to Church through school activities, they were not regular worshippers or believers in the Church (M).

These challenges influenced religious education content and processes within the classroom. They required teachers to change their approach to religious education:

I'd say now my challenge is to speak to the unbelievers and to drop the language that alienates them, and yet be able to interpret what I have from my post-graduate studies, to be able to interpret that into the life-story of, now its boys, boys in front of me, and to develop people who love a Church that alienates them anyway (C).

Maintaining a balance between being in a Catholic school where the Catholic tradition was central and the changing belief systems of the students and staff was very difficult. RECs readily accepted that part of their role was the maintenance of the Catholic tradition, but there was also a need to be part of its transformation. RECs stated that finding a language and a process for teaching tradition that did not alienate individuals outside the tradition was not easy. Furthermore, there were major implications for the content and methodology of religious education in the light of the changed status of students in Catholic schools. Such changes exert continual pressure for the reconstruction of the religious education curriculum:

The curriculum aspect is very challenging – how to try to marry that to the need to nurture faith, and how to balance the need to really give kids solid content so that they do understand their tradition. If they're going to walk away from it, at least [then] they know what they're walking away from. And how to sort of balance that with the affective side is much more difficult than the task, I think, of being an English coordinator (K).

<u>The challenges of dealing with the students and their families</u>

A further challenge that RECs proposed was dealing with families. Their concern did not relate to the day-to-day behaviour difficulties that arise in any teaching but rather to the way in which the nature and type of student now in Catholic schools was significantly different from the past. Essentially their concern was that in the past the school population came from Catholic homes. The family had links with the parish and both supported and believed in the Catholic Church. This meant that religious education could be assumed to be catechetical in nature. Today, RECs said, the majority of students were Catholic and came from families that were Catholic, but they were not involved in a parish. Their knowledge, support and belief in the Catholic Church was minimal.

> The reality is that a lot of our students aren't churchgoers, and church to them is school, and teachers who walk in and out of their classrooms could be a role model. (B)

> There is a percentage of students that don't take it seriously, I think. But I think that's because of where we are as a society. I don't think that is peculiar to my school, or to your school, or to a school in the northern or the southern suburbs. I think it's where we are as a society. (O)

It is clear that parents want to send their sons and daughters to Catholic schools, yet they want to pass on responsibility for the religious education of those children to the staff:

> We ask parents, "Why do you want to your daughter to come to this school?" And they say, "We want her to have the same education as we had and you do it for them". (A)

On the other hand, such parents' support for the Catholic dimension of the school was not, according to another REC, high on their agenda. He recalled that, at the end-of-year Mass, out of the twenty-five families of his students in religious education class, only three were represented. The parents, he argued, "didn't see it as a priority" (R). The impact that had on the religious education teacher was that it felt "like students and parents have abdicated their role of faith development to the religious education teacher" (R).

The phenomenon of families still wanting a Catholic education but not wanting further involvement with other aspects of Church was the basis of the claim made by many RECS that the Catholic school was the most important contact with Church that these students have in their entire lives:

> Well, I think for a large number of the students here, their only real experience of Church is school … they are not churched (A).

And an increasing number of students "have parents who don't give the Church support" (A). Another REC, when discussing the religious affiliation of the students in his school, pointed out:

> We've got something like 35% that are non-Catholic, and then of the Catholic ones, probably a whole lot of those are Catholic because at some point in time someone dropped a bit of water on their head. But that's about the only relationship to Catholicism they have (P).

Implications spelt out by another REC:

> So if I was working in another school where I had significant numbers of non-Catholics, our religious education would be different from that of a school where 10% of kids are non-Catholic and 25% of the kids that are Catholics don't go to Church anyway (H).

Summary

For RECs the most challenging aspect of their role was working with religious education teachers who were not qualified in religious education. RECs argued that a substantial part of the cause of these problems centred on the selection priorities that were set by schools, in particular the Principal. They also argued that the Principal would not permit teachers to work in other subject areas for which they did not have specialist qualifications. Over and above this was the issue of the general support of all staff for the religious education program in the school. They questioned why people would choose to work in the Catholic school system while being apathetic or antagonistic to the Catholic ethos. Furthermore, RECs pointed to the lack of support for the Catholic ethos from parents and students and the challenges this created in structuring and delivering the religious education curriculum.

9.4 Category 5 findings (continued): The challenge for the REC to support the Catholic Church

RECs discussed the great challenge they faced in the teaching of religious education from a Catholic perspective with all that that entails. They were unequivocal in that it was their responsibility to ensure that "the Catholic line" was central to the religious education curriculum in the classroom. One REC said, "there's no question at all that the RE teacher and every REC has to uphold the Church"(B). In addition, I think "we have to be the public face of the Church" and we have to "put the Church's case" by exploring the reasons behind the views in their historical context "that gives weight to where the Church is today" (K). For another there was a need "at times to stand up for what the Catholic Church is suggesting … it is important for us to hold up the flag and say, 'Think about this', and to challenge people's current culture" (I). However, it was also put forward by RECs that within the Catholic tradition there were many points of view:

> I mean obviously you need to teach the Catholic perspective,
> but there's a range within the Catholic perspective (E).

Despite their support for the central responsibility to teach and support the Catholic tradition, RECs stressed it was also necessary to teach the Catholic tradition within an educational context and an educational philosophy that allowed for critical thinking and self-appropriation of beliefs. One REC said:

> You must respect that [questioning] because that's how they
> make sense of it. I think we have to try to make kids see there
> are many ways to make sense of any question and we respect
> the way other people think it through (K).

Another described a way in which this was dealt with in his school:

> "I try to give you [students] a particular way to be able to
> make your minds up and have a sense of the tradition, so that
> you can see it's much more involved than making a black and
> white statement" … they also go away and continue with the
> question, which is what my goal is (G).

RECs argued further that this method of allowing people to make decisions about the Catholic tradition needed to be extended to staff as well:

> I think the REC needs to be able to encourage staff to be able to feel an obligation to put the Church perspective, an obligation to also say, "Many Catholics would support this point of view, many Catholics are having difficulty with this" … and each person has to make up their own mind (K).

RECs pointed out that it would not be educationally appropriate for a teacher to go into a class and try to force a faith response or a uniformity of view upon the students. "I'd be worried if a teacher would go in and just give one point of view and say, 'Well, this is my point of view, this is what I've learnt, and this is the way you should learn it' " (B). More stridently, another REC claimed that students, staff and religious education teachers were rejecting the Catholic tradition and being part of the Catholic Church "because the Church has disillusioned them" (N). People "have stopped going [to Church] for a damn good reason" and it was not the role of the REC to make them come back (N). Other RECs also spoke in this way and often felt in a dilemma about their professional responsibility and their personal experience and circumstances:

> And it might be heretical to say so, but it starts to feel like burned loyalty after a while, which is so meaningless. And there are questions that I think we need to be asking ourselves. But who can stand up at an RECs conference and talk about burned loyalty? (Q).

One of the RECs who was interviewed and is no longer in the role explained that this pressure between the professional and the personal was the reason for giving up the role and moving to other roles within the school:

> And I will probably say that it [personal conflicts about Church] is one of the reasons that I had to drop out… I had my personal dilemma with the formal Church and I admit that quite openly… I can no longer participate in my faith like that (T).

Other RECs said they would present the view of the Church even though their private position on certain issues was not aligned with the Church. They did not see this paradox as an issue:

> Obviously you have to defend the faith and defend what's going on, and I think you'd be silly if you didn't because of your position [as REC]. But that doesn't mean to say that's

always exactly what I think… I will defend all sorts of things
that in my head I am not sure about… I could be feeling one
way [about the Church] and saying something else (J).

9.5 Analysis of the findings on challenges in the role

Burnout

RECs described many challenges that they have faced in their role. Many RECs chose to stay in the role despite the gravity of the challenges. For many others the challenges were such that they left the role and returned to general teaching roles within Catholic schools.

At the centre of these challenges was the 'personal cost' of the role. RECs used the term 'burnout' to describe this personal cost. During one interview, an REC describing the personal cost broke down in tears and said that there was only one choice that could be made if personal health and well-being were to remain intact. This REC and others did not use the term 'worn out'. For RECs it was more than just that the role was too big. They believed that on an emotional level they could not continue in the role. It was this experience that was the primary cause of RECs' leaving the role, and consequently the primary cause of the high turnover rate among RECs. The experience described by the RECs in this thesis coincides with a range of data from other sources.

CEOM data in Figures 4.11 to 4.13 indicates that the turnover rate of RECs is very high. One of the factors in this high turnover rate is the burnout that RECs experience. This burnout is not a new factor that emerged in this research. Carroll (1992) researched reasons for the burnout of RECs in secondary schools. She concluded that religious education operated within one of two models. One model conceptualised religious education as the guardian of the tradition and the other was more broadly educational. The tensions between the two models were a cause of personal burnout and RECs moved on to other roles. Blahut and Bezzina (1998) investigated turnover in primary school RECs in Parramatta and concluded that demands made on them in the high profile tasks of liturgy and pastoral care were the major causes. In addition, they argued that a significant number of RECs were not ready and did not possess the skills to undertake the tasks involved in being members of the school executive, and this caused personal discomfort. Research by Crotty

(1998a) in Sydney highlighted that it was very difficult to attract individuals to the position because the challenges in the role were too demanding. All four researchers raised concerns about the nature of the role and the challenges that were inherent in the role. These same challenges, and others, were also raised by RECs in this current research. Historically, the burnout and turnover rate have always been high (Malone 1982). Furthermore, it was this precise issue of burnout and turnover that prompted the CEOM to commence the collection of survey data on RECs (cf. Chapter Four).

The dimensions of the role

Often the RECs felt that they were left to shoulder the burden of responsibility for religious education and the Catholic ethos of the school. This perhaps reflected the character of the person and their commitment to those principles. It perhaps also reflected that both the delegated leadership role of the REC and the school processes to encourage staff to support the REC were not strongly enough in place. Johnson (1989) found this lack of shared responsibility to be one of the key negative aspects that RECs expressed in her research. As has been noted several times in this thesis, the religious education curriculum in Catholic schools exists both in the classroom and outside of it, and the REC has responsibility for it all.

Time allocation

RECs also argued for sufficient time to perform the many functions of their role. Even though there was a developing trend for schools to split the role into REC and FDC (Figure 4.7), the overwhelming experience was that there was insufficient time to effectively do what had to be done. The RECs realised that within the school setting there were pressures and other competing demands that had to be taken into account when time allocation for all roles in the school was decided. However, they argued that the size of the role and the time they were given to do the role were incompatible. The issue of time has also been addressed in other research (Slattery 1989; Johnson 1989; Sierakowski 1991). The findings of all three of these researchers pointed to the lack of adequate time to undertake the role as one of the major hurdles to individuals staying in the role. Time given to RECs in schools, as indicated in the data in Chapter Four (Figures 4.14 and 4.15), has been consistent since 1988. Schools have not responded to this critical need of RECs.

Support

A common thread in the challenges raised by RECs was that of support. Some RECs expressed the view that support from the Principal and staff was so strong and obvious that the role was made easier. In contrast, those RECs who experienced a lack of support often left the role. Since the earliest days of the role, support has been a factor desired by RECs. In the only public document that RECs have written as a collective group (Appendix 13), there was a clear statement that the support of the Principal was a critical component in the effectiveness of the role. That statement, made in 1975, has continued to be made by RECs in 2002. A further aspect of this issue was the support RECs felt they needed for their own faith life if they were to be effective. Johnson (1989), when commenting on the same issue in her research, stated that RECs had to strengthen their own spirituality or else they would not survive.

Working with teachers

For many RECs the most difficult challenge, and the one in which they needed the most support, is in their day-to-day dealings with religious education teachers. As outlined earlier in this chapter, many RECs asserted that many religious education teachers in Catholic secondary schools lack the qualifications to be effective teachers of religious education. This was a cause of major concern. Moreover, this concern has been repeatedly raised in the last thirty years. At the 1975 RECs Conference, the RECs statement specifically referred to the lack of training of religious education teachers. Given the historical context of RECs at this time (Chapter One), with the massive increase in the numbers of school children, the departure of men and women from religious orders and the sudden growth of lay people in the teaching profession, the 1975 statement can be understood. However, the situation has not significantly improved. Woodhouse (1983), whose research had as a major focus the challenges faced by RECs, concluded that there were two major challenges. First, there were the challenges of supporting religious education teachers. Second, there were the challenges faced in planning and delivery of the religious education curriculum because of the poor quality of religious education staff. Johnson (1989) found that up to 30% of religious education teachers had not attended professional development activities in religious education. The research of

Malone (1990) suggested that one-third of the religious education teachers in Sydney Catholic schools were not sufficiently qualified. Malone found that many religious education teachers did not have a sound knowledge of religious education theory. Similar findings were made by Sierakowski (1991) in her investigation of Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. More recently, the research of Blahut and Bezzina (1998) and Crotty (1998a) into schools in Parramatta and Sydney stated that many religious education teachers were still insufficiently qualified. In his research into what religious education teachers needed to know to be effective, Rymarz (1997a) found that many religious education teachers were given religious education to teach simply to fill up their teaching load. He found that many lacked the skill and interest to be religious education teachers and that the implications for the religious education curriculum were critical. In her research into graduate courses and their function of preparing critical religious educators, Welbourne (1995) cogently argued that religious education teachers needed to be well grounded in religious education theory, to possess formal qualifications and to know what religious education was if they were going to be effective in their role.

The challenges articulated by the RECs are important, complex and enduring. These challenges are not new; they have been part of the dimensions of the role since the very beginning. Chapter Four of this thesis recorded a number of instances in the past where attempts were made to address these challenges. None of those attempts has had any significant impact. The current situation is unsustainable, and unless steps are taken to address these problems the burnout and turnover of RECs will continue.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions and recommendations

10.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is RECs and their perceptions of their role in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Of primary importance to the researcher is the analysis of the perceptions that RECs have about their role, rather the analysis of theoretical interpretations of the role as stated in documentation from CEOs or Catholic schools. Strongly related to this are RECs' perceptions of the nature and purpose of religious education. RECs currently working in the role, as well as those who were in the role at various stages during the period of this thesis (1970-2000), were the primary sources of the data.

In Chapter One an overview of the historical context of religious education and Catholic schooling in Australia was given as framework within which the origin of the role of REC in the late 1960s to early 1970s and its subsequent development could be viewed. In particular, the context of the nature of schools and staffing and an understanding of religious education were examined. The REC role grew and developed within these particular contexts.

In Chapters Two and Three, literature on theoretical approaches to religious education was analysed. An analysis of these theoretical approaches was a further framework within which the role of the REC could be examined. The literature analysed was drawn from Catholic Church documentation at both an international and an Australian level. This documentation provided an authoritative understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education that is central to the religious education curriculum as it is understood and taught in Catholic schools. The theoretical approach had major consequences for the understanding of the RECs' role. Religious education curriculum materials that were authorised by the local CEO were based upon the understanding of religious education as it appeared in these approaches. A primary responsibility of the REC was to implement religious education curriculum within these approaches. There was a high degree of direction and expectation by the CEOM and school Principals that the theoretical framework and religious education theory and content would be implemented by the REC. The

way in which religious education has been understood, and the way in which this understanding is embedded in the *Guidelines* and general religious education material, has shaped to a significant degree how coordination of religious education has been conceptualised and how it has been undertaken in schools.

Chapter Four investigated key historical data on the role of the REC in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The role of the CEOM has been critical in the ongoing development of the role of the REC. In particular, because of the ongoing partnership between the CEOM and the RECs during the period of the thesis, a range of critical stages in the development of the role of the REC was explored. Critical meetings were examined in order to ascertain how the role of the REC was perceived and supported by the CEOM. Furthermore, the CEOM, responding to the various pressures and concerns in the mid-1980s, commenced an annual survey of RECs that provided insights into individuals in the role and local school arrangements. This data was compiled and analysed as a basis for comparison with the qualitative data gained from the RECs.

Chapter Five situated this particular thesis within the body of research already undertaken on the role of the REC. As indicated in that chapter, there has been limited but important research undertaken into the role. The research has been limited both in scope and design. This particular thesis is the first doctoral study undertaken into the role and significantly extends the work previously undertaken. In addition, in the context of this study, the only other research undertaken about RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne has been a single study on RECs in primary schools. Furthermore, this thesis extends the depth and focus of research into RECs, particularly with the focus on the RECs perceptions of the role. It lays a foundation for future research into the role, and questions have emerged from the findings that could be explored in future studies.

Methodological approaches and issues surrounding the collection and analysis of data for the empirical study reported in later chapters were discussed in Chapter Six. This thesis was embedded within social science and was qualitative in nature. It used unstructured, in-depth interviews as the means by which data was collected. The analysis of the data was undertaken using inductive approaches contained within grounded theory. This approach was chosen as it was the most

suitable for the specific aims of the research, namely, understanding the role from the RECs' perspective.

Chapters Seven to Nine presented the major findings of the empirical study These findings were organised into five categories: appointment to the role; RECs' understandings of religious education; RECs' perceptions of their role; the status of the role; the challenges in the role.

This Chapter specifically returns to the major question that was enunciated as the critical question of the thesis. It provides a general and wholistic answer to the question: *How do RECs perceive their role?* Finally, it outlines a number of recommendations that have emerged from the findings.

10. 2 Synthesis of findings in relation to the RECs' perceptions of religious education

Introduction

In Chapters Two and Three theoretical perspectives of religious education were analysed in depth. These took into account international and national Catholic Church documents on religious education (Figure 2.2), as well as key research into religious education (cf. Sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). It emerged from that analysis that the theoretical approaches to religious education have undergone significant changes over the past fifty years. The various theoretical approaches to religious education have influenced the way in which the REC's role has been structured within schools.

Finding 1: The changing interpretations of the term 'religious education'

In Chapter Three, three fields of religious education were described (Figure 3.5): education in faith; education in religion; the integrated approach. This thesis concluded that the prevailing approach currently in Catholic secondary schools focuses on the "education in religion" field, but also draws upon other fields when appropriate. However, the thesis found that for many RECs there was no single approach to religious education that would always meet the needs of the time.

Religious education was a part of and responded to the particular historical context in which it was operating, and theoretical constructions of religious education were, to some extent, bound by that context.

Finding 2: The importance of language in religious education

The thesis also found that central to an understanding of a theory of religious education is the debate about language. The definitions of religious education (Figure 3.2) show the diversity of possible meanings, and the writings of researchers such as Moran (1971, 1983, 1984, 1989) point to the difficult issue of language in relation to religious education. The term 'religious education' holds in balance catechetical and educational dimensions, and a lack of understanding of these various dimensions and their place within the school context has led to confusion among many teachers of religious education (Malone 1992a). The research of Malone (1990), Engebretson (1995) and Welbourne (1995) has shown that many religious education teachers do not have a sufficient understanding of the theory of religious education.

The analysis of Church documents in Chapter Two showed that the cause of some of the confusion about the language and theory of religious education lies within the documents themselves. Statements from the Bishops of the Australian Church (REF, WPJAL, WDAU, AREFC) have tended to reiterate the statements of the Roman documents and have failed to bring clarity to the issue. One of the issues is that the language from these documents has been used in the development of religious education guidelines and policy documents that have been mandated for schools by the local CEO yet have added to the lack of clarity about the place of catechesis and education in the Catholic school.

On the other hand, the thesis also found a clear interpretation of religious education for schools can be found in the documents. It is clear that the documents stress that the primary setting of catechesis is the parish (CT, par. 67; CS, par. 51). Furthermore, there is a complementarity but also a clear distinction between catechesis and religious education (RDE, par. 68), with the aim of the school being knowledge (RDE, par. 69). Moran (1991) argued that a distinction had to be made between teaching people religion and teaching people to be religious in particular ways. This was similar to Rossiter (1983), who proposed two viewpoints on religious

education: education in faith and education in religion. This thesis has shown that RECs stress both the educational and the faith dimensions of religious education in the school, and that these have the aim of educating the students about life.

Finding 3: The importance of the school context in developing a theory of religious education

As indicated in this thesis, religious education is undertaken in a number of different contexts that required different theoretical and practical frameworks. Religious education as it occurs in the parish or the home is not exactly the same as religious education that occurs within the school setting. As CS stated, religious education is broader than schools and classrooms (CS, par. 50). As this thesis has argued, even within the school setting it is possible to describe three strands of religious education. For example, the religious education classroom is a very different context for religious education from a retreat experience or from membership of a social justice group within the school or from a school liturgy. The way in which these varying contexts within schools are considered is important in developing a theory of religious education.

The analysis of the relevant literature (Chapters Two and Three) showed that there is a lack of clarity in the language used to develop theories of religious education. The findings of this thesis also point to the lack of the kind of clear understanding of religious education that is required in a school setting. The selection interview for appointing RECs, and the criteria used are an indication that a theory of religious education is not integrated into these processes. Furthermore, some of the RECs did not possess a clear understanding of the theory and confused the various purposes of religious education. There was similar confusion on the part of many Principals, as was indicated in the type of questions that they asked of RECs in their selection interviews.

Finding 4: The critical nature of the relationship between the Catholic school and the Catholic Church for religious education

The relationship between Catholic schools and the Catholic Church and the implications of this relationship for religious education, both historically and in the present day, was an important finding. RECs described a substantial change that

is taking place in the composition of the Catholic school community. They pointed out that the value that many people in Australian society place on formal religion today is significantly less than thirty years ago. Many families who send children to Catholic schools, many students who attend Catholic schools and many staff who work in Catholic schools do not have strong connections with the Catholic Church. These people see the value of Catholic education and are committed to the Catholic ethos of schools, but they are not involved in broader Catholic Church practices to the same extent as previous generations. This historical, social and religious context requires a new emphasis in the understanding of religious education. In the past, changes in historical situations have brought about changes in understandings of religious education. New situations now require a new understanding. Language such as 'catechesis', 'dialogue among believers', 'community of faith', 'passing on the tradition', and 'involvement in a worshipping community' may no longer be the most appropriate language for the majority of students or staff now attending Catholic schools.

Finding 5: RECs' articulation of a new emphasis in religious education

One finding of this thesis is that many RECs are articulating a new emphasis in religious education that has grown out of the changing composition of Catholic secondary schools. The thesis found that RECs are supportive of the catechetical and educational approaches to religious education that have formed the historical basis of an understanding of religious education. However, they are also expressing the view that these understandings need a new emphasis if they are going to meet the catechetical and educational demands of today.

The term that RECs are using for this new emphasis is 'spiritual'. The spiritual dimension of religious education encourages the individual and communal search for meaning that recognises the sacredness of life and the world, but without insisting this search be connected with or limited to a particular religious tradition. In that sense it is similar to the emphasis in EN on evangelisation. Likewise it has links with the language of pre-evangelisation and pre-catechesis that was used by Amalorpavadass (1973a, 1973b) and Nebreda (1965a, 1965b, 1970) and was included in the REF. RECs are searching for an appropriate theoretical framework for religious education that meets the practical needs of the times. Their tentative

conclusion is that the spiritual dimension of religious education is the emphasis needed at this point in history.

10.3 Synthesis of findings in relation to the RECs' perceptions of their role

Findings six to eight emerged primarily from the historical data that was presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis, particularly the survey data that was analysed in Chapter Four. Nevertheless these findings were also raised in the empirical component of this thesis.

Finding 6: The ongoing low retention rates of RECs

The major finding of this thesis, supported by other studies (Blahut & Bezzina 1998; Crotty 1998a), is that the vast majority of individuals who have undertaken the role of REC have not stayed in it for any great length of time. Whatever might have been claimed from a theoretical perspective about the role, the reality is that the turnover has been constant and substantial over an extended period. Turnover rates have been at a consistent level since data was first collected in the 1988 survey. The implications of this, both for schools and for individuals, are significant, particularly in the area of long-term planning, curriculum and administration, and they highlight underlying problems with Catholic school structures. They point either to procedures and processes for selection that are not working or to insurmountable pressures in carrying out the role. Whatever measures have been undertaken centrally by the CEOM and locally by schools, the extent and rapidity of turnover has remained unchanged for twenty years.

Finding 7: Increasing levels of qualifications of RECs

Another finding is that individuals who entered the role of REC are increasingly more qualified in the area of religious education and theology; however, the turnover rate has not changed. Based on these findings, the argument cannot be sustained that turnover rate is a result of inadequate qualifications on the part of the majority of RECs. Data since 1988 (Figures 4.8 and 4.9) indicates a steady and continuing increase in the number of RECs with specific qualifications in religious

education and theology. Added to this is data that indicates, in relation to general teaching experience and specific religious education teaching experience, that RECs are highly experienced (Figure 4.10). So, on the one hand, individuals who embark on a career as REC are increasingly qualified and come from a strong teaching background; yet, on the other hand, the low retention rate has remained constant. Personal qualifications, teacher skills and background in religious education are, therefore, not causal factors that result in the turnover of RECs. The dominant causal factors relate to the perceived lack of status that the position of REC has within the school, the enormity of the role, and the situation that in many schools a significant number of religious education teachers do not have sufficient professional qualifications in religious education.

Finding 8: No progress on RECs requests for structural change

Data analysed in Chapter Four indicates that RECs have consistently called for an examination of the structure of their role in schools and that by and large they have been ignored. At one of the first annual conferences of RECs, a statement was written by RECs that both outlined their understanding of the role and listed some of their concerns. Their concerns were for more release time for the role, support from the school and better-qualified teachers of religious education. The annual surveys of RECs that commenced in 1988 grew out of concerns about the role, in particular the high turnover rate. In 1995, at a specially convened meeting between the CEOM, the PAVCSS and RECs, these issues and others were raised again. Meetings sponsored by the Episcopal Vicar during 1998 and 1999 also focused on the role of the REC. The result has been that schools have been left to determine their own priorities and procedures in relation to the role. This thesis has found that RECs are still waiting for structural changes to their role.

A central component of this thesis was an investigation of the historical context of the origins of the REC role (Chapter One) and the historical data from the CEOM on people in that role (Chapter Four). The data that emerged from the general historical context and from the CEOM provided a framework for the empirical component of the thesis. The findings from the empirical study are summarised in the findings nine to thirteen.

Finding 9: RECS feel that the role is not taken seriously

One of the key findings of this thesis is that many questions are raised as to whether the role of REC is taken seriously in schools. The core issue for the RECs themselves is whether religious education is valued in Catholic schools. RECs are unanimous in stating that at a theoretical level religious education in all its dimensions is the central and distinctive feature of Catholic schools. Moreover, RECs report that at a policy level (both within the CEOM and locally through the school Principal) the theoretical importance of religious education is not questioned. However, the findings show that the RECs question whether, at a deeper level, the rhetoric of the importance religious education is matched by the reality. In fact, many RECs have concluded that the reality and the rhetoric are not matched, and they are left wondering if their role serves an important purpose. It appears that the very thing that RECs stand for is being undermined, or treated as unimportant.

Finding 10: The selection processes for RECs need to be addressed

All Catholic secondary schools since the early 1980s have developed local role descriptions for the position of REC (Appendices 11-13). The role descriptions are elaborate and comprehensive, and contain details of a range of skills and qualities that are required of the person who is to undertake the role. From the experiences recounted by RECs of this critical phase of selection, this thesis highlights the fact that it does not focus on the fundamental aspects as contained in role descriptions but on personal qualities. The process does not take into account the criteria for the role that are outlined in diocesan descriptions. On numerous occasions, Principals coopt individuals for the role without using standard processes for selection and recruitment of senior staff. This raises the further issue of the level of understanding that Principals have of religious education. As the data from the CEOM showed, very few Principals had experience of the role of REC, and perhaps this lack of experience was the reason for their lack of understanding of the theories of religious education. A lack of understanding may also be the reason behind the division of the role into REC and FDC without being fully aware of the theoretical problems that arise because of such a division. This lack of experience may also be

an element in the employment of religious education teachers who have strengths in other disciplines but do not have adequate qualifications in religious education.

Finding 11: The broad dimensions of the role

At a very basic level, the findings of the empirical study indicate that the REC role is multi-dimensional. In particular, the findings show that there is a high level of skill required in religious education as it pertains to the religious education classroom, as well as to the liturgical and whole school dimensions of religious education. In short, the 'job' of the REC is very broad and very difficult. There is a strong sense in what RECs said about these areas in interviews that there are bigger issues at the core of the role – issues such as the status of the role and the quality of religious education teachers – that cause tensions and difficulties which result in them leaving the role.

Finding 12: The need to improve the status of the role

The overview of empirical research into the role of the REC as presented in Chapter Five pointed to the absence in many cases of appropriate status for the role. In particular, the work that focused on RECs in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Brandon 1984; Sierakowski 1991) found that the status of the role needed to be improved. This thesis (Chapter Eight) detailed RECs' comments on the issue of status and found that the majority of RECs believe that the status is not what it should be in Catholic schools. The findings pointed to a number of indicators of status: the role of the REC on the administrative/leadership teams, the comparison of the REC with other curriculum leaders, the position being given Deputy Principal status, promotional opportunities, support from the Principal and the rest of the staff. A finding of this thesis is that lack of status is a major cause of 'burnout' among RECs and of the high turnover rate.

Finding 13: The need to improve the quality of religious education teachers

The most critical finding of this thesis is in relation to the professional quality of religious education teachers. The overwhelming majority of teachers of religious education come from Catholic backgrounds and Catholic families, and

attended Catholic schools. Many also gained teacher qualifications at Australian Catholic Teachers' Colleges or University where they undertook basic units in religious education methodology and introduction to theology. Nevertheless, this is not a sufficient level of qualifications to be a competent and effective teacher of religious education. In other subject areas within the Catholic school, the expectation is that teachers have formal qualifications in their subject specialities, but this is not the case with religious education. RECs pointed out that their greatest professional challenge, and a cause of ongoing personal demand, is their dealings with religious education teachers who do not possess qualifications to the necessary degree to carry out their role. This results in RECs having to function as daily mentors to a range of teachers of religious education. The personal demands of this are significant, and RECs argued that no other subject coordinator had such pressures in their role. They argued that English Coordinators, for example, could rightfully assume that everyone teaching English is a suitably qualified teacher of English. They could assume that they had mastery of the basic content material of the English curriculum. RECs said that they could not make that claim about many religious education teachers. In addition, RECs proposed that this aspect of their role was made even more difficult by other factors. Many religious education teachers show a distinct lack of interest in religious education. RECs often linked this to employment policies and practices within the school. It is the experience of RECs that many religious education teachers are given religious education as a means of filling up their teaching load. This results in a substantial number of religious education teachers with little or no training taking classes of religious education. For RECs this seems to place religious education at the bottom of the school priorities. It is more important for schools to have a qualified English teacher than it is to have a qualified religious education teacher. This adds weight to the RECs' conclusion that religious education is not given appropriate recognition in schools.

The body of research (Chapter Five), the Church documents (Chapter Two), the theorists in religious education (Chapter Three) and RECs over the last thirty years (Chapter Four) are all united in the view that it is essential for those responsible for religious education to have specialist qualifications in religious education. The body of research into religious education teachers in Australia (Malone 1990; Engebretson 1995; Welbourne 1995; Rymarz 1997a) has concluded categorically that teachers of religious education need to have professional

qualifications that include theory and content. However, this thesis has shown that of all the issues the RECs raised about their role, working with many unqualified religious education teachers is the one that concerns them the most and also creates for them the greatest challenge.

10.4 Recommendations emerging from this study

A number of recommendations emerge from this thesis and they have been listed under the following headings.

Recommendation 1: Selection processes for the role of REC

There needs to be a more uniform process in the selection of RECs that takes into account both the local needs of the school and established criteria for the role. The criteria could be drawn from CEOs around Australia who have established criteria for the role that include a minimum level of qualifications and experience. Changes to the selection process would also need to include the development of suitable questioning of the applicant on such things as knowledge of the theory of religious education and of contemporary issues in religious education. The practice of Principals moving outside of a school process and approaching individuals and offering them the role is not appropriate. Furthermore, it is important at the interview that the applicant is asked about their understanding, and also guided in the school's understanding of their role. The CEOM could play an important collaborative role in the establishment of clear guidelines and criteria for schools in relation to the employment of RECs.

Recommendation 2: Review of role descriptions

Role descriptions that are devised at school level need to take into account the dimensions of the role and what is actually attainable in the role. The role descriptions should take into account the three strands of religious education that function within a school and allocate specific and achievable tasks. The role descriptions need to include in them a three to five year plan that will be reviewed by the school administrative/leadership team and which is in keeping with the broader school plan.

Recommendation 3: Changing current structural arrangements for the role

To assist the REC in carrying out the role more effectively a number of structural changes need to occur. At present in most Catholic secondary schools the REC position is part of the two to three year industrial cycle of appointments, and the time and money allocated to the role is determined within that process. The appointment of RECs would benefit from being outside this process and adopting the process that is used for Deputy Principals. This would allow for appointment of RECs for up to five years, and also allow for more substantial time and money to be given to the role. It is recommended that schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne should follow other dioceses and have it mandated that the REC position is automatically a Deputy Principal position.

Recommendation 4: Professional development of religious education teachers

As a matter of priority only those individuals who are professionally qualified to teach religious education should be given that responsibility. If for some reason individuals who are not qualified are required to teach religious education then the school should assist that individual in obtaining qualifications as soon as possible. It should be part of the contract of employment that study would be undertaken, and at the local level reduced teaching loads, payment of fees associated with the study needs and other support for those studying should be granted by the school.

Recommendation 5: Changes to provision offered by the CEOM

Staff levels in secondary religious education at the CEOM need to be restored so that support services to RECs are improved. In addition, the functioning of the REC networks needs to be revised. One possibility is for the REC networks to be structured along the line of the Curriculum Coordinators Convenor days, where four full days a year, one per term, are set aside for professional development and support.

<u>Recommendation 6: The CEOM needs to take a greater lead in religious education</u>

The CEOM has played an important role in the development of religious education curriculum and in the professional development of RECs and religious education teachers. However, given the present situation in schools more needs to be done. The CEOM needs to take a greater lead in three related areas. Criteria need to be established in relation to the appointment of RECs that include directives to Principals about the process for selection and ongoing support of RECs. In addition, the status of the role of the REC needs to be clarified and mandated. Finally, there need to be guidelines in relation to the employment of religious education teachers. In conjunction with the PAVCSS and RECs, the CEOM needs to develop a clear policy directive to schools that addresses the issues mentioned above. Such a policy would considerably enhance and give support to RECs in schools and put in place a plan for the future.

10.5 Significance and limitations

This research has built upon previous research and reached a number of conclusions about the role of the REC and the nature and purpose of religious education. The research is the first in this area and has developed a basis upon which other research could be undertaken. But there have been limitations. In the course of the research, questions and areas of concern arose that were not dealt with fully. Further research in these areas would help in the exploration of these key points in relation to the role of the REC. In particular, the role of the REC was analysed from the perspective of the REC. Future research could explore the role of the REC from the perspectives of the Principal and of the religious education teachers. Furthermore, a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the role of the REC did not emerge from the data in the interviews. Future research could collect data on the effectiveness of the role. Finally, one of the greatest challenges mentioned by RECs was that many religious education teachers lack appropriate qualifications. Accurate data on the qualifications of religious education teachers would be an invaluable aid to research in this area.

10.6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyse the role of the REC from the perspective of the REC. It found that the role is enormously challenging and that there are major issues that need to be attended to. Endemic low retention rates of RECs and concerns about the status of the role, coupled with a lack of sufficient numbers of suitably qualified religious education teachers, are serious issues for the Catholic education system in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. These issues have been raised in many contexts prior to this thesis but they have not been adequately attended to. In the empirical component of this thesis these issues were strongly articulated by the RECs who were interviewed. The strength and clarity of the articulation of the RECs perceptions of the role and of the issues that confront them, the schools in which they work, and the Catholic education system of which they are a part, demand that action be taken.

1. Outline of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator from the 1995 *Guidelines for Religious Education* in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

2. Material presented by Kevin Treston at the 1973 conference of Religious Education Coordinators and Principals in Melbourne.

3. A statement of the role of the Secondary Religious Education Coordinator by the Melbourne Archdiocesan team of Religious Education Coordinators, 1975.

4. Material presented by Mark O'Loughlin at the 1980 Religious Education Coordinators Conference in Melbourne on evaluating the religious education program.

5. Material presented by Mark O'Loughlin at the 1980 Religious Education Coordinators Conference in Melbourne on evaluating the role of the Religious Education Coordinator.

6. Summary of group discussions at the 1995 seminar between the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, Religious Education Coordinators and Principals.

7. Summary of 1st Religious education specialists forum.

8. Summary of 2nd Religious education specialist forum, with specific focus on the role of the REC.

9. Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1988 survey form on the role of the Religious Education Coordinator.

10. Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1995 survey form on the role of the Religious Education Coordinator.

11. Role description of a Religious Education Coordinator from a boys' secondary school in Melbourne.

12. Role description of a Religious Education Coordinator from a girls' secondary school in Melbourne.

13. Role description of a Religious Education Coordinator divided into REC and FDC.

14. Focus questions used as a basis for interviews with Religious Education Coordinators.

15. Ethical approval from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.

16. Ethical approval from Catholic secondary school Principals.

17. Ethical approval from RECs.

18. Letter to RECs immediately prior to their interview.

19. Copy of mapping of one category of findings.

20. Ethics approval from ACU Ethics Committee.

Appendix 1

The Role of the Religious Education Coordinator in the 1995 *Guidelines for Religious Education* in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

The Church esteems the work of the teacher. Consequently, the role of the religious education coordinator has particular significance and importance within the school and parish structure. It is, therefore, essential that schools and parishes clearly define the role of the religious education coordinator in the light of their needs, expectations and profile, and within the school provide sufficient release time so that a clear vision of the Catholic school as an integral part of the Church's mission is demonstrated.

The ministry of the religious education coordinator can be divided into three general areas: Formation, Curriculum and Administration.

Formation

The religious education coordinator, in collaboration with the Principal, should be involved in:
•continually nurturing his or her own spiritual development to enable authentic guidance and leadership; •promoting and supporting efforts to foster an awareness that the school must reflect the life of the faith community; •giving practical evidence of the priority of religious education, faith development and the distinctive nature of the Catholic school; •encouraging reflection, prayer and liturgical celebrations within the school community; •encouraging study and professional development in theology, Scripture, liturgy, Christian morality and religious education; •fostering parental involvement in their own faith development and in the religious education of their children.

Curriculum

It is the responsibility of the religious education coordinator to assist the principal in coordinating the school's religious education program. Duties involved in this function include:

•formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and programs for religious education in the school; •assisting teachers to ensure that classroom programs are sequential, relevant, comprehensive and, in accordance with diocesan guidelines, authorised by the local bishop; •ensuring that programs cater for the appropriate stages of psychological, moral, educational and spiritual development of students; •liaising with other staff members to foster the integration of religious education into other curriculum areas; •convening regular meetings and discussions with those involved in religious education in the school; •involving parents in the religious life of the school (sacramental formation, programs, retreats, workshop days, liturgies etc); •communicating with staff and priests/chaplains to ensure timely and adequate preparation for liturgies and classroom involvement; •promoting and informing the wider community on the religious dimension of the school; •promoting the notion of pastoral care as the responsibility of everyone across all aspects of school management, organisation, policy and programming.

Administration

To assist in realising all aspects of the role, the religious education coordinator should: •collaborate with others to ensure that development of the religious education program is included in the School Development Plan; •monitor school practices to ensure their congruence with school policy; •be available to assist staff in planning class programs, liturgies and activities; •promote regular and meaningful assessment, evaluation and reporting in religious education; •plan and implement procedures for evaluation of the total religious education program; •ensure staff are informed about conferences, in-services and current issues in religious education, and make available and advise on professional reading in religious education; •organise details for the use, maintenance, review and update of religious education resources; •administer the religious education budget; •ensure staff are provided with opportunities to share personal insights, reflections, observations and evaluations arising from their work.

Appendix 2

Kevin Treston's material on the role of the REC, 1973

<u>THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR IN THE SCHOOL</u>

a. The REC is a member if the school staff who accepts responsibility of leading the RE team and coordinating the RE Program in the school.

b. The role of the REC should be to clearly defined and then effectively communicate to: the staff, the students, the parents. The Principal will take the initiative in clarifying the role of the REC and officially publicising it in staff administration.

c. The job description of the REC includes the following areas:

i. convening meetings of the RE team

ii. directing and planning the coordination of the RE Program so that it is developmental and comprehensive

iii. acting as a liaison officer between the RE program of the Christian school and the total parish program. The Parish Coordinator and the REC will need to function together in the planning stages to avoid overlap of services or contrary focuses

iv. being available for staff consultation

v. coordinating and directing the Pastoral Care Program of the school

vi. acquiring and classifying RE resource materials for the RE resource centre

vii. being the pivotal communication link between the central diocesan office and the school

viii. communicating the RE program to the total school staff, especially in sensitising the staff personal to the implications of the aims of a Catholic school

ix. assisting morale of the RE team in developing a consciousness of the faith dimension of their endeavours in their share of calling people to the Kingdom of God.

Appendix 3

A statement on the role of the Secondary Religious Education Coordinator by the Melbourne Archdiocesan Team of Religious Education Coordinators, April 18th, 1975

A three-day conference for Secondary Religious Education Coordinators was organised by the Religious Education department of the Archdiocese at the Diocesan Centre from April 2 to April 4, 1975, at which the principal speaker was Brother Marcellin Flynn, MS. After reflecting together on our own experience as Religious Education Co-ordinators and on the significance of the findings that emerged from Brother Marcellin's survey of Form 6 boys in 21 New South Wales Catholic schools, we, as a Melbourne Archdiocesan team of Religious Education Co-ordinators, wish to make the following statement.

1. Religious education in a Catholic school will only be effective if the school projects an image which is congruent with the message that it seeks to communicate, i.e. an image of a Christian community, and a ☐ of the Kingdom. A number of factors will determine the clarity of this image: the organisational model on which the school is run, the climate and morale of the school as a whole, the religious education program, and the positive collegial involvement of the staff, the parents and the students in the school life.

2. With particular reference to climate and morale the evidence strongly suggests that senior students perceive religious education to be intimately linked with their contentment or happiness at school. The quality of the students' feelings about the school directly influences their feelings about religion. Hence one of the most important concerns of the Religious Education Coordinator is the climate and morale of the school.

3. Morale in the school context includes many components. The principal was perceived by Form 6 students to be the key school morale builder. This fact seemed to be linked with, among other things, their perception of the particular organisational model of school. The two extreme models of overcontrol or undercontrol both create alienation which is the opposite of morale, and which in turn would negate any effective influence of the religious education program. Other creative components of morale include the quality of supportive relationships between staff, interest in the students as persons in their own right and informal contact with them, the competence and confidence of the teachers in their role as educators, the commitment of teachers to the journey of faith, and parent interest in the school life.

Hence, although the Religion Co-ordinator will be a committed and key assistant in all attempts to heal alienation and build morale within the staff and student body, the results of Br Marcellin's study seem to put the onus, in this area, squarely on the principal's shoulders. The work of the Religious Education Coordinator, no matter how energetic and well directed, will come to nothing unless the principal has managed to build up, with the support of the Coordinator and with the assistance of the staff, an atmosphere in the school which harmonises with the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.

4. As far as possible the Religious Education Coordinator is concerned with all the dimensions of the religious development of students, both formal and informal. Although the co-ordinator has much work within the school as regards the religious education program, the building of resources and aids, sessions with the staff, pastoral counselling, etc. we see that the role of the Religious Education Coordinator extends further than the walls of the school. It reaches out to the environment of the world in which the school is situated. It involves parent education programs, liaison with parish communities, zone in-service programs and working with Chaplains. It also involves responsibility to explore media developments associated with learning to access their value with regard to religious education.

5. We recognise the burden of this task for one person alone. We would hope that in larger schools there would be other key people in the Religious Education team who would assist in the organisation of the programs at form levels, and share the responsibility for the development of the school faith community.

6. We note that many people teaching religion in our schools have little training in this field, that many find it a difficult subject to teach, and that they are already called upon to do extra preparation and participate in co-ordinators' meetings etc. In view of this, and the fact that in-service days for secular subjects are becoming a regular feature of staff/timetable arrangements, we feel it only right that principals should give release time for Religious Education in-service just as high a priority as release time for secular subjects.

7. Finally we feel that, as many of our goals are faith goals which are often not tangible or visible, we do need the support of others. Already we feel greatly encouraged by the support of our Archbishop, of the Religious Education Department, and of each other in the Diocesan team of Religious Education Coordinators, in undertaking the task and promise of religious education in this Archdiocese.

Appendix 4

Material presented by Mark O'Loughlin at the 1980 RECs Conference on evaluating the religious education program

"What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's Magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: 'My teaching is not mine'."

Pope John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS

1. Is there a religious education syllabus?

2. Is the syllabus based on the spirit and content and methodology of the *Guidelines*?

["I am happy to direct their use…" Archbishop Little]

3. Does the syllabus specify 'concepts', 'topics', 'learning objectives', 'learning approaches' and 'resources'?

4. Is each 'topic' adequately treated by the 'learning objectives' which have been chosen?

5. Are the 'topics' and 'learning objectives' of the Junior, Middle and Senior Secondary Guidelines allocated to specific years?

6. Are all the 'concepts' and derived 'topics' which are specified in the "Guidelines" included in the syllabus?

7. Are the 'learning approaches' faithful to the Word of God?

['To preach not their own selves…' Overview, p. 9]

8. Is the Person of Jesus of Nazareth at the heart of religious education?

[Pope John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae* 5]

1. To what extent does each RE teacher 'appreciate' the various 'concepts' and 'topics' in the syllabus? How reasonable for each teacher are the 'learning objectives' which have been nominated?

10 Are the 'learning approaches' serving the concrete needs of the faithful? [Overview, p. 9]

11. Are all 'aspects of the learning process' adequately represented in the selection of the 'learning experiences'? [Experience / knowledge / skills / attitudes / values / faith response. Overview, pp. 13-16]

12. Do the 'learning objectives' and 'learning approaches' accord with the stage of readiness of the students? [Overview, p. 11]

13. To what extent is each RE teacher conscious of the stages of moral development? [e.g., Kohlberg's six stages]

14. Are 'learning approaches' genuinely multicultural?

15. Do the RE teachers have an understanding of what is meant by 'values'? Is the emphasis in values education on analysis or clarification, or encouragement, or development of values?

16. Is each 'learning approach' a situation for 'Catechesis'?

['We are concerned with the development of the person in faith.' Overview, p. 6]

17. Do the RE teachers and 'learning approaches' encourage a faith response, whilst fully respecting the freedom of the individual? [Overview, p. 11]

18 Do the RE teachers and 'learning approaches' respect the person's particular stage of development in faith? [Overview, p. 6]

[e.g., Westerhoff – Experienced / affiliative / searching / owned faith Overview, p. 7.

Fowler – Experienced / affiliative / conventional / personal / community / universal Flynn, p. 75]

19 Is there a regular review of 'learning objectives' and 'learning approaches' in the light of their suitability for teachers and students?

20 Is there a consistent teacher evaluation of the effectiveness of 'learning approaches' in achieving chosen 'objectives'?

Appendix 5

Material presented by Mark O'Loughlin at the 1980 RECs Conference on evaluating the role of the REC

EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR

"Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you."

Jeremiah 1:7

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS

1. How clearly defined is the role of the REC?

2. How well is the role known and accepted by the whole school community?

3. What are the appropriate REC responsibilities in a particular school?

4. How effectively are these responsibilities being exercised?

5. What steps should be taken in the light of the answers to these questions?

SOME SUGGESTED REC RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Accountability to the principal through regular timetabled meetings for consultation and dialogue.

2. Participation in RE staff appointments.

3. Communication with the RE staff and chairing RE staff meetings.

4. Education of the RE staff in the spirit and content and methodology of the "Guidelines".

5. Facilitation of the development of the RE, syllabus from the "Guidelines".

6. Availability for assistance for individual RE teachers.

7. Facilitation of regular timetabled meetings of the year level RE teachers for planning, co-ordination, evaluation and support.

8. Planning appropriate meetings of the whole RE staff.

9. Promotion of RE staff development and in-service opportunities.

10. Education of the whole staff in the nature of the RE program.

11. Encouragement and planning of staff prayer and sacramental life.

12. Fostering the integration of appropriate RE components into the secular disciplines.

13. Communication with parishes and chaplains.

14. Integration of chaplains into the RE team.

15. Communication with the Catholic Education Office.

16. Planning and coordinating communication with parents on RE matters.

17. Facilitating appropriate school based religious education for parents.

18. Drawing up an RE budget.

19. Authorising expenditure within the approved RE budget.

20. Management of the RE resource centre.

21. Co-ordination of the use of the RE resources.

22. Planning and co-ordination of school liturgies, sacramental life, prayer and service programs.

23. Facilitation of regular evaluation of learning objectives and learning approaches by the RE staff.

24. Evaluation of the overall religious education curriculum of the school.

25. Promotion of appropriate ongoing religious education for past pupils.

Appendix 6

Conference at Treacy College, Parkville

In the flier developed it stated that:

"This conference aims to focus on issues related to the collaboration between the Principal and Religious Education Co-ordinator in exercising responsibility for religious education in the Catholic secondary school."

A significant part of the conference was devoted to clarification of the issues around the role of the REC. While there were many issues raised I have selected those which directly state things about the role of the REC.

Group A
The personal role, faith witness and sharing of self

Group B
Need for ongoing training for RECs and RE staff

Group C
Difficulties for RECs

RE tagged on to end of load

Priority to RE in staffing is needed

Credibility of teachers

Tension between having specialised RE staff and more generalised RE staff

Challenge or relevance

Units 3 and 4 – intellectual challenge and stimulus

Challenge – sound Christian values at basis of everything have to support RE

Expectation that the REC is 'all knowing' – an authority

Complexity and number of tasks expected in any one-day. Job never finished.

Group D

Difficulties of REC's role in secondary schools today

Climate or religion – source of embarrassment, culturally, not acceptable. Hurdle to be faced by staff and students.

Condition of living as a Christian today – pressures etc. How does the teacher have an understanding of what is meant by 'values'? Is the emphasis in values education on analysis or clarification, the development of the person in faith.' Overview p. 6]

Do the RE teachers and 'learning approaches' encourage a faith reality?

Time allotment/and POL rating

RECs have more to deal with than other faculty heads, to carry the spiritual nature of the school

REC role shouldn't be seen in the same category

Size of the school – workload is constant

The way staff treats the REC's perception of role

Position which comes up every 2 years, it can take 18 months for a person to get 'into' the role.

Is the status of RE and REC adequate?

VCE has contributed to the raising the status of RE, particularly units 3 and 4

Quality of work required at this level

Parents' perception of RE – not an important subject

Understanding of RE

Quality of resources – outdated

Esteem REC holds within school community e.g. an REC being involved in the curriculum committee and seen as a good educational practitioner

Coping with change, different cultures and background present in school community

Group E

Symbolic status of role

Definition of role in a particular school

Religious ambivalence in schools

Recognition of obtainable outcomes

Appendix 7

1st Religious education specialists forum
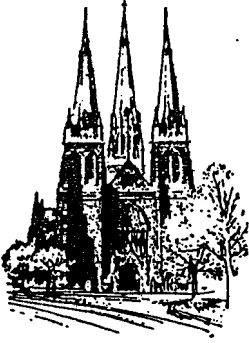
CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

EPISCOPAL VICAR FOR RELIGIOUS-EDUCATION

James Goold House 228 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

(PO. Box 146, East Melbourne, 3002)

Telephone: (03) 9926 5645
Facsimile:　(03) 9926 5694

14th May 1998

Mr Joe Fleming

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

Dear Joe

Thank you for participating in the First Religious Education Specialists
Forum held at Simonds Hall on 6th May.

From the experience- of the day and feedback I have received, the Forum
was a historic moment of bringing together a wide-range of specialists in
our common mission of forming children and young people in the light of
the Good News of the Lord Jesus. The Texts project served as a key to open
up more fundamental concerns which we need to resolve together.

I enclose a summary of the points raised during the presentations and
dialogues of the Forum. Reflecting on this material, I invite you to propose a
theme for our next Forum and suggestions on how it -could be approached
and resource people who could facilitate our dialogue (form *enclosed)*.

With renewed *thanks* for your collaboration,

I remain, yours faithfully, in
Christ.

Rev. Msgr Peter J Elliott

PROPOSALS FOR 2ND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SPECIALISTS FORUM TO BE HELD
LATER IN 1998

Name:

Position
- LIST IN PRIORITY WHAT THEME OR ISSUE WE SHOULD EXAMINE TOGETHER
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

• WHAT RESOURCE PERSONS COULD HELP US IN THESE AREAS? *(numbers to match themes above)*

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

• COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON THE 1ST FORUM

• PEOPLE WHO COULD BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FORUM.

Please return no later than Friday 5th June to: Mrs Lucia Brick,
Religious Education, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, PO Box 146, EAST
MELBOURNE Vic 3002

FIRST RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SPECIALISTS FORUM HELD AT SIMONDS HALL, SOUTH YARRA ON WEDNESDAY 6TH MAY 1998.

1.   PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT ON TEXTS, TO *KNOW WORSHIP AND LOVE*

Fr Chris Toms presented the key themes and the statistical breakdown of submissions in the report of the Daffey Committee on Texts. The following points emerged in discussion.

   The family context is more. important than texts Professional development for teachers is essential Parish & School community involvement needs to be strengthened

Secondary students: Parents `let go' and don't have the same involvement with their children as in primary years.
Nothing can take the place of witness and presence of the RE teacher, but the text its elf could enrich the teacher.

2.   PRESENTATION OF THE MELBOURNE TEXTS PROJECT

Msgr Elliott proposed possible approaches to preparing texts for the Archdioceses of Melbourne, emphasising the need of assistance for teachers.

Student text calls for an easily revised manual for teachers. Texts have to support the weaker teacher, as well as opening doors for more skilled teachers.

In discussion, problems of giving texts to unprepared teachers were raised:

>   What's missing is the underpinning
>   Students want to know how much teachers know
>   Students can tell when a teacher doesn't know answers
>   Importance to interrelate with ACU and CEO
>   Raise the quality - RE is the core of the identity of Catholic Schools

How many times have principals appointed Science teachers and have asked them to teach RE?

Students in. ACU, have missed out on solid catechesis, so ACU is putting the "icing on the cake".

Less experienced teachers may lock themselves into text. Texts need to be well presented and introduced to teachers.

Texts will need to be adapted for composite classes and a parent guide is desirable.

The Pre-school God Start Program is widely used and opens possibilities. Child minding in the parish may offer opportunities for some faith experience.

- Texts will open doors to worship experience

- Texts need to be interactive at primary levels

At middle Secondary levels texts should focus on self-esteem (affective) and Church history (core content), noting that girls' faith commitment is easier.

Texts should equip Secondary people with ways of coping in their life now e.g. New Age, Issues Major Ethical Issues, Justice Education.

- The teacher's manual should be easily revised and open to multi-media options.

Discussion followed on how the texts will be written, need for different and good writers for each level and co-ordinating editors.

60% of Primary go on to Catholic Secondary schools, so RE may stop Gr 6 for the others. Texts will need to be adapted for their needs.

How do we see Texts fitting in with VCE Texts and Traditions? Options include:

•' Slimmer texts dealing with different topics to complement VCE •
Texts & Traditions - A Parallel Book
•   a Volume on the Gospels

It is important to get the right kind of themes that dovetail.

A Prayer Enrichment Program is being prepared for schools.

The problem of an integrated curriculum was raised but at this stage the texts apply   to RE classes only.

3. FORMATION

The afternoon session took'the form of a dialogue, based on brief presentations by the key sectors in RE on the basic question of teacher formation and the role of the REC.

A.   *Teacher* Formation - ACU

Students come to the ACU from school for a 4 year course scripture/theology/RE; extensive field experience with Liturgy and retreats.

Bachelor of Theology students are provided with a 1 year course, option of taking RE as a method. 75% would select RE method. They must do 5 units and the classes are extremely "mixed". Not many older people end up teaching RE

ACU depends on Schools continuing formation of teachers. Those that fell by the wayside did not have time for meeting with other schools, time for RE development, as well as seeking support from School Principal and CEO.

Some schools do a great job of challenging student teachers. The best RE teachers are those . who have done further studies.

4th year students at the ACU BA Dip Ed find Theology included in the course.

Melbourne RE Guidelines are a useful resource. The work of Chaplains is good but there is only one RE lecturer on site at Christ Campus. The course is well-designed and the calibre of students is impressive.

B.   Inservice (CEO)

Who is our audience? Teachers/Catechists. Good RE is first and foremost good education and we are handing on a faith tradition. Hence the importance of professional development. We need to help teachers to understand level of readiness and capacity to listen.

Who are the partners? Parents and guardians. We need to look at schools/home/parish,culture diversities, nature of family today (sensitive). Issues of leadership and administration, pressures of society.

There is a need for more professional development, with the goal of good strong committed education teachers, strong background in theology, close to and understanding school and parish experience, people of faith.

This is a mosiac that needs to be bound together.

RE is not just a Prep-12 year process but a lifelong process, handing on a tradition with passion.

We must ascertain the needs of our clientele and build on rich Spirituality in professional development. We need many more. people than we have now. Three years after the Guidelines we must look at how we deliver formation. What is missing in teachers is the underpinning, because "there is no substitute for Quality".

C.   The experience of the RECs

It is really hard to be an REC, because RE is not given the place it should have. In some cases RE is the class that is taken if needed.

Underpinning is a problem. RECs need more time to help teachers. Today students are not going to take everything you give them. They are asking questions and thinking deeply as in other subjects.

Major issues include: Personnel and helping schools, lack of a high profile role of REC, 1st & 3rd year students given that role in some schools, when they are not ready.

We need to ask how and why RECs are appointed in our schools.

What are the expectations? Release time is not given, but money is not going to replace what the REC needs to do and plan with RE staff.

The Parish and School issue needs to be faced. There is a good relationship between Parish and School in many places.

Faith Education - Does it belong to a School or Parish?

This raises the question of Sacramental preparation programs. The Parish scene: if you live here, you work here.   -

The Sacrament of Confirmation was discussed: at present, before the end of Grade 6.

The Melbourne Guidelines were discussed. Some people have found them difficult to use,. but there are many positive aspects. When teachers are planning, they have to unpack them and think and prepare.

There was a call for RECs and Principals to form a leadership team

D.   The Role of School Principals

A principal outlined a CECV scheme, 1978:

Every school paid $2 per child to release teachers. 20 years later still $2.

Not as many people applying for release. We must do more to drum up interest. There is a need for more money for Formation Program at ACU. This principal had a freeing experience through understanding the scriptural basis of his faith.
Looking at needs: One proposal is a block release of teachers - in RE and Theology for whole semester, full time year. School chaplaincies need to be reviewed to avoid "hit and miss". Chaplaincy formation is important.

- *The* CEO - should offer competent and confident
assistance • *Principals* - should offer support and
recognition for RECs
- *Parish Priests* - should be involved in process. They are still managers of schools. They
  are an important part of what we are discussing.
A text is not the answer but a text may be a tool.

Another principal welcomed this informative day and noted how discussions had branched into two separate issues:

1.   Texts (pg. 23 of *Daffey Report,* Perfect Criteria). Texts will not be a problem. Any teacher can take information and use it. But formation of teachers and   support by principals is essential.

2.   People who teach.

Some concerns were raised at this stage about teachers trained at ACU - Accreditation does not mean a person is a Catholic. The RE teacher must be a Catholic.

The problem of Texts in Composite Classes is not an issue; skilled teachers can get around those issues. However Parish involvement is very important so we can work together as a team.

Principals have a staffing schedule - they do not have money. If we are serious about the business of Catholic Education, we can be creative.

Parish budget usually does not allow extra money for RE. Why are Parishes subsidising the Schools, if the main substance of the school, good RE, is not.there?..

> Very small schools often go out of their way to develop RE. RE   not the ugly duckling it is is the core! It deserves priority.

> Discussion moved to the adequacy of preparation at the ACU.

> Context in which student teachers are formed seems narrow.   What makes a good RE teacher? Accreditation needs to be looked at.

> Perhaps it is "as good as it gets"; we do the best we can.

> In context of propaganda - we sift to find truth, which is more complicated than impressions.

> An objection was raised that RE is not only about traditions, not only academic - the end purpose is to produce a Christian person.

> An REC pointed out that faith development of other teachers in the school is essential. "If I can't challenge my staff, the text is not going to do it!"

There is a lack of understanding of how important RE is. [If] this is a good as it gets, I'm getting out now... But I think it can be better."

> It was pointed out that ACU - does not set Accreditation. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria sets the accreditation requirements and in comparison to other states in Australia, the Victorian requirements are very high.

> The ACU works within constraints. Students must leave with recognised qualifications. The social context was discussed. Young people are'not as accepting of things as they used to be. Faith development happens through dialogue and community.

> Again discussion returned to the role of RECs, which is "huge", younger, not a leadership r role, lacking status in the school, not a "career path".

> There was a strong consensus that RE needs to be given a high priority in schools. Answers to a lot, of issues are much more complicated than "we have to get this person to do better".

The question of texts will be resolved by dialogue with people and good preparation.

Suggestions were made to strengthen the role of RECs by getting a number of RECs and people in leadership in Catholic Schools to talk about their experience, to discuss difficulties in that role and determine what it means to be an REC.

But there was a sense of pride "we have a love of what we do".

The day concluded with the observation that it has been a long time since we've been able to sit down with such a mix of people and talk frankly.

The Episcopal Vicar for RE. then emphasised his pastoral role in bringing people together to share insights and exchange experiences, adding that, putting aside "it's as good as it gets", we are certainly not on the "Titanic". He underlined the point that this is the first RE Specialists Forum and indicated that there will be more in the future on other essential .and important themes.

Appendix 8

2nd Religious education specialists forum
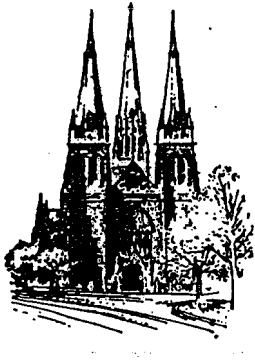
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Parade East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

 (PO. Box 146, East Melbourne, 3002)

Telephone: (03) 9926 5645
Facsimile: (03) 9926 5694

Our ref. R101102101199

8TH , February 1999 ,

Mr Joe Fleming

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE
Dear Joe

I am pleased to be able to enclose a report on the Second Religious
Education Specialists Forum, held on Wednesday, November 25th, 1998, at
the Cardinal Knox Centre.

The findings in this report will be presented to the joint working committee
of this Vicariate and the Catholic Education Office, so that concrete
proposals for developing the role and status of the REC can be prepared. In
that regard, you are most welcome to forward your own proposals to myself

I thank those of you who were able to participate in this interesting and
challenging forum. The role and status of the Religious Education
Coordinator is one of the major areas calling for renewal in our mission of
teaching the living Faith of the Church.

With every prayerful wish,

I remain, yours faithfully, in Christ

'Rev Mgr Peter J Elliott, EV

SECOND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SPECIALISTS FORUM HELD AT CARDINAL KNOX CENTRE HALL - WEDNESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER 1998.

The theme for the day was Focus *on the Religious Education Coordinator* raising the issues of *formation, qualification and continuing commitment to Faith of RECS. It* would provide an opportunity for open: dialogue through group participation.

Mgr Elliott welcomed everyone and said the forum would be aimed at looking at the key people in our schools and faith community.He especially welcomed the RECS to the forum and invited people to be frank and honest. The' programme of the day was as follows:

Session 1

l.   What can a Parish or School expect of an REC?

2.   What support does an REC need from parish and school?
Session 2 - Groups working on 3 themes

1.   Expectations of Parish and School

2.   Supporting the REC

Reports on Themes 1 and 2, followed by general additions

Session 3

1.   Summary report on Theme 3

2.   Panel Response to Theme 3
Plenary Forum

What can a parish or school expect of an REC? - *Fr John O'Reillv-PP St Alb*

Fr O'Reilly prefaced his‾ presentation with some general comments, reflecting on the importance of RE and RECs in our schools. He went on to point out that "as a parish priest I expect":

A person who, as part of a team, in a position of responsibility is recognised and acknowledged as a leader.
A person with a sound knowledge of Church teaching.

A person who has a deep conviction about his/her faith commitment A worshipping Catholic, who has a sense of belonging to a Parish. Someone who is involved in some ministry in their parish, other than school, eg. Reader, Minister of the Eucharist.

A competent teacher with sound classroom skills and knowledge of the, subject matter.
A confident person, capable of having and conducting adult interactions with staff and parents.
A person who is prepared to give and receive, on an academic, a spiritual and professional level.

Summary:

A committed Catholic, competent teacher and comiiiitted educator.

What Can a parish or School expect of an REC? - *Miss Patricia Ryan. Principal. Catholic Ladies College - Eltham*

Miss Ryan said she thought there were 2 parts to this question.

1.   What do we expect the REC to do?

2.   What do we expect the REC to be?
What is the REC?

The REC must be:

A faith filled person, living out the faith day-to-day.

Be prepared to continue learning Scripture and Theology and able to communicate that learning.
A person of faith, and who has faith in people.
The REC enables. students to grow and to learn.

The role of the REC is demanding. This is where you place on the line, in every classroom, what is precious to you, and that takes great courage.

The REC also needs to be a sign of hope to children.

Above all the REC is someone who witnesses the Love of Christ in everyday life.

The REC listens to concerns and anxieties of teachers.   The REC is a consoler, encourager, someone prepared to share their own vulnerability.

Summary:

The R.EC needs to be: Curriculum Organiser, .Theologian, communicator, Liturgy specialist, carer, upholder of justice, challenger of conscience and a person who personifies God.

<u>What support does an REC need from parish and school? - Ms *Deborah Kent.*
Mazenod College -</u>

Ms Kent commenced by saying "I love my job.   I want to say that at the
beginning, because as I speak, you might not think so.   I am sustained by faith
and the Eucharist".

A Typical day at school - I commence no later than 730am, back home after 730pm

We need people with faith commitment, not just for RECs.   Every member of
our Faculty should be the same.

The values promoted in other groups do not fit into our Catholic Ethos. When hiring
teachers, they need to know values of a Catholic. They stand in front of a class
representing the Church.

We are preparing students for life *and eternity.* It is our presence which is
important; RE staff should be faith filled.

Why should the REC have to fight for her faith in her faculty?

eg. Job description: RE, unfortunately is the last faculty to be time tabled. "Maths,
English, a bit of RE".

We need proper priorities, we need to establish a Catholic School to prepare
students to meet their Creator.

My office is seen as a place for people to come.

I welcome this Conference and I welcome the initiative of the Archbishop and Mgr
Elliott.

<u>What support does an REC need from parish and school? - Ms Rosa *Wilkinson, St
Mary's School - Thornbury*</u>

Ms Wilkinson commenced by saying that the role in Primary and Secondary
schools is different. In Primary there is the preparation for the 3 Sacraments.

- The Principal's support and dedication to Religious Education is of paramount
importance.
- Decisions made must give RE priority. Commitment from the Principal
encourages commitment from the staff.
Time release for planning with teachers and for adult faith development of
both teachers and parents.
- We need an RE Program that has depth and is well developed curriculum
wise. There is a high turnover of RECs in Primary - every 2 years.
- The REC needs to be a member of the leadership team of the school and hold
a P.O.L.

We need support for ongoing professional development of the REC. As the role of the REC is becoming broader, more specialist skills are needed. Network meetings alone are not meeting the needs of the REC.

   Time release is granted for Professional Development. What about RE?

Support for ongoing PD of staff through staff meetings, school closure days and PD offered from other organisations.

We need a role description which clearly outlines expectations of the REC, in terms of his/her responsibilities, not only the school community, but also parish staff/community.

An understanding needs to exist that school is part of Parish Community. Parish

- Incentives for the REC to choose the role as a legitimate career path.
    - Financial commitment to the RE Program for the acquisition of.. up-to-date resources which enthuse children.

Parish

   We need support from Parish Priest, Pastoral Associate, Catechists.

Regular meetings with Principal, Parish Priest and other relevant persons, in order to foster communication, enhance planning, clarify expectations and strengthen parish/school links.

   Parish commitment to Sacramental
   Program. Greater input from Parish Priest.
  Session 2 - Participants split into 8 Groups working on *3 themes with the* findings:

Theme 1 - Expectations of Parish & School

   Expectations placed on REC is just endless

   Reframe question: "What do,you expect them to do" (as a priority).

We stress discussion of the role of an REC in some sort of framework - "What can't the school expect of an REC?"

RECs as leaders, include appraising the way the curriculum is developed and delivered.

   RECs have a big role in the parish.

   Passing on the Charism of the Order (where
   appropriate). Passionate about their faith.

The REC is empowered to build/promote ethos/faith/spirituality of school community..

   RECs as a group still need to have a life, to have balance.

Formal qualifications - Theology, Grad.Dip. RE. Continuous learner viewed as an instrument - who has knowledge and can pass it on.

   Faith commitment and willingness to share.
   "Person" should be foremost.

Parent education has become part of role of REC. This requires time and different skills.

The context of where religious tradition fits into today's community needs consideration.

Theme 2 - What support does an REC need from Parish and School?

Access to Priests and Principal. Good Liturgy from parishes. Trained teachers who want to teach RE.

Role of REC should be something that teachers will aspire to and this requires support.
To be part of leadership team.
Institutional support for RECS, clustering.
To see role as crucial - P.O.L. 3.
Support and respect of principal and
priest. To provide formation for the role.
More than an adequate budget.

Skills and knowledge practised by
everybody. Time commitment to enable
fulfilment of role. Link between faith
development and RE. Staff who support
Catholic Ethos.
Proper release time and financial resources.

Affirmation of RECs & their special qualities. Pastoral care shown for
them. Appropriate Inservice, especially for new RECs":

Margaret Stewart, CEO reported on Theme 3 - Strategies for Raising the Status of the REC in Parish and School

- Give the REC- 1^u Assistant status. Give clear expectations of qualifications and experience to go with that status.
- Encourage RECs to become Principals and allow them to in-service.

- Careful selection of the REC by those who carry authoritative responsibility for RE in the particular community.,
- The REC should be on a school executive.

- Involvement in the recruitment and selection process of staff - particularly of the RE faculty/Sacramental classes.
- Being valued- in an environment that is not hostile.

- Being sustained in faith by a partner or spiritual director.

- Give adequate time allocation for the REC.

- Put strategies in place that elevate the role or sets it apart from other co-ordination roles.
- Put strategies in place that provide a clear description of the parameters of the role:
  - administratively -
  academically -
  pastorally
  - liturgically

  but make it a role that is formed and shaped by the local community.

  Consider performance reflection (review/appraisal) as a means of professional formation

See the role of RE Leader as a career path.

Induct new RECs at a diocesan level (aside from the school context)

Provide structured professional development for RECs in a similar way to that which is offered to curriculum co-ordinators, deputies.
Continue to support the pursuit of appropriate academic qualifications for RECs.
Panel Response

(Mr Tony Byrne, CEO; Dr Kath Engebretson, ACU; Mrs Judi Todd, Principal - St Peter Julian Eymard ; Mr Micheal Loughnane, REC - Caroline Chisholm College.)

The value of Religious Education is a priority.
Where do our RECs come from?
In Melbourne - value of the integrity of local Parish and school to have the ability and be able to make decisions by themselves.
It is the responsibility of us all to raise the role so that it is a fulfilling role for the person who has it.
A focussed program of professional development is needed. In that focus there should be support for RE. We need to develop Specialists.
RECs need to be leading figures in the parish.   Their role needs to be promoted by the Parish Priest. They need to have people they can talk to.
RECs need to be given the opportunity to promote themselves in the school. Our young teachers need that model. They need to be supported. They need to undertake study in Scripture, to be confident to play a major role in groups.
RECs need a salary commensurate with the enormity and commitment to the job.
Our instinct is to evangelise - it's worth fighting for!

FLOW ON DISCUSSION

What makes a vibrant Catholic School? What makes it come alive?

1. REC

Key leader within school
High status position
Good background and qualifications

Implications for school administration. One of the most frustrating aspects of not being able to bring to the school what brings it to Life
2. Texts need to be:

Clear Balanced
Attractive User
Friendly

3. Principal and Admin

   People who genuinely believe

People who are conversant with contemporary Catholic Teaching and spirituality
The training and background of Principals should take this into consideration
Every teacher should be reasonably knowledgeable about Contemporary Catholic
Church
   Accreditation Review needed.

3.   Education of RE Staff in:

   Church Tradition
   Theology
   Spirituality
   RE

   Qualification Review Needed
Time has come to take action. We need to shift our attitude. An intelligent living
faith can be taught to students. They are crying out for it.

Plenary Forum - Points raised by participants

• The Basic Theology Course and the Church's Story have made an enormous
     difference to--teachers.
   •   There is a place for short term planning - the issue of induction of new RECS.

•   When you talk to Principals - it's the money point. Let's get the philosophy
right. • We need to make sure schools do not become scapegoats.for people in the
diocese who are not doing their jobs.
•   There appears to be an appalling lack of knowledge on Church teaching and
     history.
•   There needs to be a close look taken of the basis of our Theology courses at our
      Graduate Diploma level.
•   Vatican II was not a response, it was a challenge.   Misinformation is still
     being passed on to Catholics.
•   There are only 2 CEO support and admin staff available for support, whereas

Mgr Elliott thanked everyone for coming.   He said a working committee of the Vicariate and the CEO convened by the Archbishop is looking at the role of the REC.

Mgr Elliott also said that the RE Newsletter would be revived. It will also be a forum for exchanging information and will be sent to all RECs (Primary and Secondary).

He also said that the Archbishop will be convening a meeting early next year of Yrs 11 and 12 teachers to listen to what they seek in the Upper Secondary texts resources.

Appendix 9

The 1988 Catholic Education Office Melbourne survey of
RECs

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

CATHOLIC DIOCESAN CENTRE
363 ALBERT STREET
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Telephone: 6650333

CORRESPONDENCE TO: BOX 146. P O. EAST MELBOURNE 3002

.   **FACSIMILE:** 6634417
OUR REFERENCE:

28th January, 1988

. CIRCULAR-TO PRINCIPALS OF ALL SCHOOLS IN THE- ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

Dear Principal,

RE: PROFILE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CO-ORDINATORS

I would like to ask your co-operation in arranging for the completion of the attached proforma which will give a profile of Religious Education Co-ordinators in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The form has been designed to obtain information about the release time given to these staff members, and as well about their experience and qualification both in general teaching and"in Religious Education.

This information will be used to set up an. accurate, up-to-date data base which will help ensure that adequate planning continues for

Religious Education in this Archdiocese. In particular the information will assist in the planning of in-services tailored to the needs of Religious Education Co-ordinators. As well, the information will help in the provision of back-up support and services.

Should you have any queries, please contact Mr. Andrew Scown (Primary) or Mr. David Richards (Secondary) of this Office. Your co-operation in compiling this profile and return it via the appropriate Administrative Services Consultant by 26th February, 1988 is appreciated.

With every best wish,

Yours sincerely,

(Rev. T. M. Doyle) DIRECTOR OF
CATHOLIC EDUCATION

PROFILE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CO-ORDINATORS

FEBRUARY 1988

Please complete a separate form for each staff member employed as Religious Education Co-ordinator.

Please ensure that Instructions for Completion have been read before this form is filled out.

SCHOOL: ....

PERSONAL DETAILS

Surname: _ Christian Name:

Teacher Registration No.:

C.E.C.V. Accreditation Number:

RELEASE TIME ALLOCATION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CO-ORDINATION Number of Hours per 5 day week release time for R.E. Co-ordination:

EXPERIENCE

Number of calendar years experience: as teacher:

in Religious Education:
as Reli.gious Education Co-ordinator:

QUALIFICATIONS

Teaching Qualifications (e.g. Dip. T, B.Ed.)

Qualification: Institution: Year Granted:

Qualification: Institution: Year Granted:

Specific Religious Education Qualifications (e.g. Grad.Dip. R.E., B. Theol.) Qualification: Institution: Year Granted:
Qualification: Institution: Year Granted:
Religious Education Courses being undertaken in 1988 Course:.
Institution:
Course Sponsorship, if applicable (e.g. C.E.C.V, School, Parish):

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Contact Person: School Registration No.:

Principal's Signature: Date:

Appendix 10

The 1995 Catholic Education Office Melbourne survey of RECs

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICES (.-
MELBOURNE/ BALLARAT/ SANDHURST/ SALE)

PROFILE OF SECONDARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION/FAITH
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS

A separate form is to be completed by each staff member who holds a paid position in the areas
of Religious Education Coordination and/or Faith Development Coordination.
Data will be forwarded to the appropriate Office.

This information should be as at February Census day, 14th February 1995.

Information on qualifications, PORs, ASTs and Accreditation are not required here as they w_
ill be taken from the 1995 Staffing Return and Personnel Information Return:

Enquiries to Mr Matt McDonald on (03) 665 0333.

I SCHOOL DETAILS

E

School code (CEO number for the school)

Location: ------------------

School Name: _ _ _ _ _ _ - _ _ _ _ _

PERSONAL DETAILS

Initials Surname   CEO Number | c | | | | · | | | |

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3 RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONNAITH DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION

POSITION

Please tick the box witich best describes your position:
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Coordination of all aspects of *Religious Education (curricular and extra

for the whole school across a
year level or levels

ASSISTANT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR

ACROSS THE SCHOOL	AT PARTICULAR YEAR LEVEL(S)
All aspects of Religious Education	All aspects of Religious Education
The Religious Education classroom program	The Religious Education classroom program
Liturgy	Liturgy
Faith Development	*Faith* Development

FAITH DEVELOPMENT *COORDINATOR*

Coordinating Faith Development for the whole school

ASSISTANT FAITH DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
RETREATS COORDINATOR
OTHER Please Specify ....

4 OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Please indicate, by ticking the relevant box(es), if you have any responsibilities in addities those associated with Religious Education/Faith Development Coordination.

Year Level Coordinator...
Home Room Teacher...
Pastoral Care Coordinator.. _
ReligiousEducationTeacher..
Coordinator (Other Subject)...
Other *Please specify* ....

Are you a member of the *school* executive/administration team?   Yes   No

5 EXPERIENCE

Note: If a stag' member has worked 3 years full time and worked S years part time, then the number ofyears experience is &

Number of completed calendar years experience:
> As a Religious Education Teacher
> As a Religious Education/Faith Development Coordinator
> As a Religious Education/Faith Development Coordinator in this school

6 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION/FAITH DEVELOPMENT RELEASE I'l1UE

Total employment allotment: Periods *per cycle*

Teaching allotment in RE: *Periods per cycle*

Time release. specifically for REC/Faith Development: Periods per *cycle*

QUALIFICATIONS IN

If in 1995 you are pursuing any tertiary studies in.Religious Education or theology, please complete the questions below:

QUALIFICATIONS IN PROGRESS IN 1995		
Academic Institution		
Campus Location		
Qualificati n Title (eg Bachelor, Diploma)		
Field of study (eg. RE, Theol.)		
Year Course Commenced		
Proposed year of Completion		

8 OTHER STUDY RELEVANT TO RE/FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Please enter details of any study or formation *other than* terdary studies relevant to Religious Education, which you have previously undertaken or that you are currently undertaking.

9 ROLE DESCRIPTION' Does your school have a documented role description for the Religious Education Coordinator?   Yes   No

Signature...........

Principal's signature.................................... . ...»............. Date ....

Appendix 11

Role description of an REC
1988 Boys' secondary school

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1. The REC is appointed to carry out the practical application of the RE Policy as set out by the CEO.

2. The following is an outline of the task of the REC.

    2.1   To ensure that a balanced presentation of the whole Christian message is given to the core elements of the message.

    2.2   To maintain records of course of study at each level and evaluation of units taught.

    2.3   To encourage teachers to communicate with parents of their students in an effort to help them to understand the content and methodology of the course in accordance with the guidelines of the CEO.

    2.4   To have a meeting with the RE Team at each Year Level once every two to three weeks. These meetings aim to help teachers to carry out their collective tasks.

    2.5   To meet regularly with the individual RE teachers to help them to carry out their task effectively and with satisfaction.

    2.6   Both the Group Meeting and the individual meeting to aim to give guidance to teachers in methods and materials available in presentation of the various topics of the course as well as providing some opportunity for prayer and faith formation together.

    2.7   To promote Religious Vocations within the school and ensure that it is covered within the RE program.

    2.8   Liaison with Chaplain

3. There will be regular meetings of all RE Teachers together - it is recommended every three weeks. These meetings will look to the administration of the RE Department as well as some of the following.

    3.1   Encouraging teachers to improve their theological knowledge with current books, catalogues, periodicals and audiovisual software.

    3.2   Helping update RE references with current books, catalogues, periodicals and audiovisual software. Ensure that this material is stored in a place known to all RE staff.

3.3   To encourage teachers to improve their theological knowledge and teaching methods by attendance at courses and local and diocesan seminars.

4. To liase with Chaplains in order to organise:

4.1   Regular liturgies and paraliturgies, especially the celebrations of the Eucharist and Reconciliation - at least each fortnight.

4.2   Organise liturgies or paraliturgies for the following:

a] First staff meeting of each term

b] Opening of the school year - whole school
c] Ash Wednesday
d] Holy Week
e] Easter
f] ANZAC Day ceremony
g] Pentecost
h] The Assumption
i] Mission Week
j] All Saints' and All Souls' day
k] Christ the King
1] End of Year - year level
m] End of Year - staff
n] Edmund Rice Day

4.3   Promote regular prayer meetings for staff.

Appendix 12

Role description of a REC **1989 Girls' secondary school**

The Religious Education Coordinator has the following responsibilities regarding:

l.   The Principal

To assist the Principal in forming the school's religious education policy and in allocation of RE staff

2.   Teachers

To assist teachers, especially those new to the school, in matters relating to courses, resources, class management, etc. and to support and encourage them.

To chair meetings of RE staff and of RE convenors. Minutes of such meetings are to be kept and a copy given to the Principal.

To arrange, in conjunction with the Principal, a school-based in-service program for RE staff.

To co-ordinate and encourage RE staff attendance at external in-service.

To liase with RE convenors at each level.

To attend level meetings as required.

To encourage social activities amongst RE staff.

3.   Courses

To ensure that teachers are familiar with the Diocesan understanding of religious education as expounded in the *Guidelines for Religious Education.*

To ensure that all RE staff have copies of the *Guidelines*

To coordinate the development of courses at each level.

To coordinate the development and implementation of courses of study for Years 11 and 12 students which include units from the VCE studies "Religion and Society" and "Texts and Traditions".

To oversee courses at all levels with the aim of developing a well-integrated and appropriate courses from Years 7 to 12.

To supervise the processes of course evaluation, student assessment and reporting.

4.   Liturgy and Prayer

To coordinate the planning and preparation for whole-school liturgies such as the Opening Mass.

In conjunction with level convenors, to organise a roster for the celebration of Eucharist for all classes within the school.

In conjunction with level convenors, to organise a roster for the celebration of Reconciliation for Years 7-11 classes.

To be available to assist RE staff in the preparation of class liturgies.

To administer the music tapes belonging to the department.

To coordinate the provision of prayers for the daily bulletin.

To prepare, or arrange to be prepared, a short prayer for the beginning of staff meetings or staff in-service days.

To support and encourage staff initiatives in prayer.

To assist in the promotion of an atmosphere of prayer within the school.

5. Chaplains

To arrange meetings between chaplains and RE staff as appropriate, e.g., in preparation for a particular year level's liturgies.

To negotiate with chaplains regarding liturgy rosters, to keep chaplains informed of general developments in school.

To invite chaplains to school functions.

To maintain regular contact with chaplains.

6. Resources

To develop close familiarity with the school's RE resources and with new publications as they become available.

To ensure that RE teachers are familiar with the school's RE resources and appropriate new publications.

To keep RE teachers well-informed about resources, in-services, speakers conferences etc.

To meet representatives of RE publishing companies.

To arrange for the taping of valuable radio and TV programs.

To be familiar with the periodicals subscribed to by the department so as to be able to direct teachers to appropriate articles.

To build up and maintain material in the RE department's vertical file.

7. Finance

To prepare a budget and monitor spending so as to ensure that budgets are not overspent.

To pay department accounts.

To authorise departmental spending.

8. Library

To work with the librarian in the maintenance of the RE collection.

To regularly - once every year or two - dispose of publications that are no longer useful.

To liaise with the AV technician regarding the maintenance of the RE audio visual collection.

9. Catholic Education Office

To liaise with the RE department of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.

To attend Religious Education Coordinators meetings and Conferences.

To attend regional Religious Education Coordinators meetings.

10. Parents

To explain, when necessary, the nature and content of RE program to parents, e.g. in the newsletter or on Parent-Teacher Nights.

To respond to parent enquiries about RE in the school.

To assist in the provision of relevant RE programs for parents.

11. Social involvement

To encourage staff and student participation in organisations and events such as Amnesty International, Mission Week, Walk Against Want, Fast for Faith.

Appendix 13

FAITH DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATOR

The Faith Development Co-Ordinator is part of a team consisting of the Principal, the VCE and 7-10 RE Co-Ordinators and one or more Chaplains who are together responsible for developing the religious education and faith development of the College Community.

The team will need to meet on a regular basis.

The Faith Development Co-Ordinator, with the above team, is:

1. To enhance student faith development by -

Developing and implementing a sequenced program of retreats, seminars, prayer and spirituality sessions from Years 7-12.

Communicating information to parents and involving parents where possible.

Developing Liturgy Committees - at year level comprising students and staff - to be responsible for organising prayer at level gatherings and liturgies at that level.

Co-ordinating the preparation and celebration of the Opening of The School Year Eucharist, the Founders' Day Eucharist, the Lenten liturgy and the liturgical life of the College.

Co-ordinating the celebration of class Eucharist on a rostered basis.

Ensuring the presence of all appropriate prayers in the diary, assisting all teachers to use prayer in the classroom and generally fostering prayer in the College.

2. To enhance staff faith development by:

Organising a program of reflection and prayer experiences for staff, staff liturgy, guest speakers, and input on various aspects of theology.

Encouraging staff to become accredited to teach in a Catholic school and administering such accreditation.

Informing staff of available courses and programs outside the College to do with faith development, and encouraging attendance where appropriate.

Organising for prayer at staff gatherings as appropriate.

3. To communicate regularly with College Chaplains and to facilitate their involvement in College life.

4. To co-ordinate and foster the religious dimension of the creative arts, with particular attention to religious music, liturgical movement and religious art in the College.

5. To organise social action groups in the College where appropriate - e.g., St Vincent De Paul, Amnesty International.

6. To manage the use of the Chapel.

7. To administer the budgets
   for The chapel
   Religious Art

   General - student seminars and sessions, staff seminars and sessions, music tapes, books, photocopying
   Liturgy - Founders Day, Opening Eucharist, End of Year Eucharist, other liturgy

8. To organise a regular contribution to the College newsletter in the area of faith development.

9. To be a member of the Administrative Team of the College.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CO-ORDINATOR - ROLE DESCRIPTION

The Religious Education Coordinator is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the Religious Education Program throughout the College.

The Religious Education Co-ordinator is:

To develop and implement the formal Religious Education Program in the College in accord with Archdiocesan *Guidelines* and in consultation with the College community.

To evaluate the review the Religious Education Program.

To communicate with parents on the content of Religious Education.

To monitor the student report format and to oversee the distribution of reports.

To provide and encourage initiatives in teacher development in Religious Education and to offer special support and assistance to less experienced teachers.

To encourage teachers to become accredited to teach Religious Education, and administer such accreditation.

To oversee and support the Religious Education level co-ordinators and to communicate with them on a regular basis.

To ensure appropriate assessment of students in Religious Education.

To administer the Religious Education Budget.

To be familiar with resources in Religious Education and to co-ordinate the acquisition and use of suitable resources for Religious Education through the College.

To be involved in the development of curriculum in subjects other than Religious Education that involve theological issues.

To attend the Religious Education Co-ordinators conference and regional network meetings.

To work in conjunction with the Faith Development Co-ordinator and assist with access for him/her to Religious Education teachers and students as necessary.

Appendix 14

Focus questions guide for the interviews

FOCUS: You as a Religious Education Coordinator

a   Why did you decide to become a Religious Education Coordinator? What were your expectations and hopes? What did you want to achieve? What helped or hindered you in achieving these? Why did you leave the position? How may you have stayed in the role? Induction - did you get any, what sort?

o   In the employment situation did the Principal convey a particular image of the REC?

o   How would you describe your role as a Religious Education Coordinator?

o   Has this changed from when you started in the role to what you do now?

o   What has caused those changes - you, the system, experience?

o   Where do you get your support? What part do external factors such the Catholic Education Office, networks, AARE, ACU, professional development, conferences help you? What about the support within the school? Informal contacts with other RECS? How would you evaluate and rate these sorts of supports?

o   What skills and abilities do RECs need? How do they keep their own spirit alive, their own religious beliefs and practices, and development of faith? Are formal qualifications helpful?

o   What have been the greatest challenges in being a Religious Education Coordinator? Points of tension? Are there any new challenges? That is, over time what have you noticed?

a   What position/status does the role have in this school? What about other schools - even if you were not the Religious Education Coordinator but a teacher of RE?

a   How is it [was it] perceived by others in the school - the Principal, staff, students and parents, priests?

o   Does the position need enhancing? How would you go about doing that? What needs to happen from a structural point of view to make it happen? What part might the Catholic Education Office have?

o   Industrially having the role with the POL - what does that mean? Was it better prior to 1990 when it was not in this position?

o   In relation to other KLA heads, how is the position perceived? What is the place on the curriculum committee or the leadership team?

o   Are RECS valued? Should they be treated differently from other heads of departments? Why? In what way? How is the value felt and seen?

v   How are RECS leaders in the Catholic school?

o   There is a perception that RECS have a high turnover rate? Why do you think that is? Is it alarming? What can be done to reverse the trend?

FOCUS: The nature of the role of Religious Education Coordinator

o   One major part is the development of curriculum. How do you go about doing that with an experience/inexperienced staff?

o   The RE *Guidelines* have loomed large over the period. Two sets, 1984 and 1994. How have you perceived them? Have they helped you in this area? Have they helped you formulate your role?

o   What is RE? What has been the theoretical position of RE? What are we doing in RE? What is it that you are coordinating? What shifts in pedagogy have you noticed? Where have these shifts come from?

o   Does, has the Catholic Education Office helped in the defining, in a theoretical way, what you do? Is there a coherent view of the purpose of an Religious Education Coordinator? What about the work of RE theorists and researchers?

o   In many ways the role expects/assumes you to be part of the Church. What are the pressures in this, particularly in areas of curriculum development and pastoral care of students and staff? How do you handle this?

    Role description - what does/did it say? How much value in it? What would you see as the crucial components?

FOCUS: Models of relip-ious education coordination

a   What does your role description say about your role? Is it Religious Education Coordinator and/or FDC? What do they mean in this context? Have they been different in different schools?

o   There have been different models such as overall coordination with people with designated positions at year levels, sometimes FDC, sometimes Pastoral Care, sometimes liturgy, sometimes camps.

o   Splitting curriculum and faith - what do you think? Splitting knowledge and belief?

o   What model of professional development do you engage in for the RE staff and for the staff in general?

v   Future models? APRE model in other states?

FOCUS: **School Principals and the REC**

a   What do you look for in RECS? What do you think of the RE/FD split? Why are people following that model?

a   Numbers and qualities of applications?

o   What are the tensions in employing RET and RECS?

o   What sense of pressures on RECS?

FOCUS: **Catholic Education Office staff and RECs**

o   At the Catholic Education Office, was there a particular approach to working with RECS? Was there a theoretical view?

o   The secondary staff group.

o   What sense of pressures on RECS?

o   What needs, challenges and supports?

54   Value of Conference, networks, general PD?

Appendix 15

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Ethical approval from the CEOM

</div>

<div align="right">

Catholic University
17 Castlebar Road
Oakleigh 3166
May 18th, 1999

</div>

Attention: Director of Catholic Education
        Fr T. M. Doyle
        East Melbourne

Dear Fr Doyle,

        I am writing to gain your approval to interview members of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. As you are aware I am currently undertaking doctoral studies at ACU Mercy Campus. The thesis is exploring the development, function and place of the Religious Education Coordinator in Catholic secondary schools.

        One aspect of the thesis involves the use of Catholic Education Office, Melbourne data on Religious Education Coordinators from 1988 to 1998, for which you have already given permission in February 1997 - copy of letter attached.

        The second aspect for which I am seeking approval is to interview staff who have and are working in Catholic secondary schools as Religious Education Coordinators or Faith Development Coordinators. It is anticipated that I will interview somewhere between 60 and 80 people. The interview of about 60-90 minutes will be in the mode of an unstructured interview and will occur in the workplace of the interviewee or whatever is deemed by that person as appropriate. All interviews will be taped and transcripts will be made. Following the code of ethics of ACU there will not be disclosure of names of those interviewed, or the schools in which they are working or did work when they were Religious Education Coordinators. The storage and disposal of tapes and transcripts are controlled by the code of ethics of the University.

Stages in the process of approval for interviews are:

1. Gaining ethical approval from ACU

2. Gaining approval from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne 3. Gaining permission from the school Principal
4. Gaining permission from the individual

I have been granted ethical approval by the University. So that you are fully informed of what I would send to the schools I've attached draft letters to the Principal and the individual to be interviewed. I would appreciate any additions to the text that you would deem appropriate.

My wish is that I could send letters to the Principals before the end of this school term and then contact the various Religious Education Coordinators early in term three and conduct the interviews as soon as possible. Consequently, I would appreciate a response from you at your earliest convenience. If desired then I would make an appointment to discuss these matters with you. My direct line is 9563 3641.

I take this opportunity once again to thank you for your support of my studies in this area. I hope that the findings of the research will be of benefit to Catholic Education Office, Melbourne and to the wider school community. Upon completion of the research I will forward copies to you.

Sincerely yours,

Mr. G. P. Fleming Australian Catholic University Christ Campus 17 Castlebar Road Oakleigh 3166

CATHOLIC DIOCESAN CENTRE
383 ALBERT STREET
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Telephone: 9665 0333

CORRESPONDENCE TO: BOX 146, P.O., EAST MELBOURNE 300L
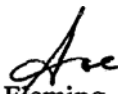FACSIMILE: 9663 4417

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE:
G96/317

25 February 1997

Mr G P Fleming

Catholic Education Office (Archdiocese of Melbourne)
James Goold House
228 Victoria Parade

Dear Mr Fleming,

I am writing with regard to your intra-office memo of 31 January 1997 in which you referred to your proposed research project, designed to focus on Religious Education Co-ordinators in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne as key leaders in promoting and maintaining the Catholic ethos of schools. I understand that you are undertakingthis project as part of your studies for the degree of PhD from the Australian Catholic University.

To this end you have requested approval to use resource data gathered by the CEO and in particular, to have:
   • access to the data collected in the REC's surveys over 1986-1997;
   • permission to use/publish this data in your thesis.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle, subject to the following conditions:

1.   Any substantive modifications 'to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.

2.   Information relating to individual teachers or schools is to remain confidential. It should not be possible for individual schools or teachers to be identified from the manner in which information is presented in your thesis.

.   At the conclusion of the study, a copy or summary of the research findings is to
be forwarded to the Information Services Unit of the Catholic Education Office. .
Where the research involves a thesis, a copy of the thesis is also requested.

I wish you well with your research study. If you have any queries
concerning this matter, please contact Mr Mark McCarthy of this Office.

With every best wish,

Yours sincerely,

(Rev. T. M. Doyle)   ..
DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC
EDUCATION

Appendix 16

LETTER TO PRINCIPAL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL SEEKING APPROVAL TO APPROACH RECs

Attention: The Principal

Dear

      In January 1999 I commenced lecturing in Religious Education at ACU. Prior to that I taught in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne for 22 years and in the past four years I have worked as an Education Officer at the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne where the major focus of my work was Religious Education.

      Currently I am undertaking doctoral studies at ACU in the area of Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators. As part of that research I wish to interview 60-80 people that in the period 1982-1998 carried out these roles in Catholic secondary schools.

      I've attached a letter from the Director of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne and from ACU indicating their approval to approach you. Upon your approval I would write to the person concerned via your school and seek their permission to be interviewed. The member of staff would be a most valuable person to interview because of his/her experience with Catholic Education.

      The inconvenience and interruption to the school and to the staff member would be the time for the interview. I expect that the interview would take 60-90 minutes to conduct. The interview will be tape recorded. It would need to be mutually determined when and where the interview would take place. I am prepared to meet at a time and a place that causes the least disruption and inconvenience to the

school and the individual - this may mean that the interview would take place during that person's preparation time or before or after school. As a compulsory element of the ACU Ethics Committee details such as the name of those interviewed, name of schools or any information, which enables schools to be recognised, are not permitted. Confidentiality is required and ensured by legislation. The substance of the interviews will be used in the thesis.

This research will be of benefit to individuals, schools and to the Catholic system as a whole in examining Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in secondary schools. One of the intended actions upon completion of the research will be feedback to the Catholic Education Office.

I've attached an outline of the project and consent forms for you to return to me:

G.P. [Joe] Fleming Australian Catholic University Christ Campus 17 Castlebar Road Oakleigh 3166

PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT FORM RETURN SHEET

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Investigation into Secondary Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR: MR. G. P. [Joe] FLEMING

*I have read and understood the information provided in **the letter and any questions I have** asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I give permission for a letter to be sent to the following staff member requesting an interview:*

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the school or the individual

NAME OF PRINCIPAL: NAME OF SCHOOL: SIGNATURE:

DATE:

**Upon receipt of this I will sign and date your response.
NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: MR. G. P. [JOE] FLEMING
SIGNATURE:
DATE:**

Please return in the envelop provided

Appendix 17

<p style="text-align:center">Ethical approvals from RECs</p>

LETTER TO THE COORDINATOR

Attention: The Religious Education Coordinator /Faith Development Coordinator

Dear

In January 1999 I commenced lecturing in Religious Education at ACU. Prior to that I taught in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne for 22 years and in the past four years I have worked as an Education Officer at the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne where the major focus of my work was Religious Education.

Currently I am undertaking doctoral studies at ACU in the area of Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators. As part of that research I wish to interview between 60-80 people that in the period 1982-1998 carried out these roles in Catholic secondary schools.

I've attached a letter from the Director of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne and ACU and your Principal indicating their approval to approach you to see if you are prepared to be interviewed as part of my research.

I expect that the interview would take 60-90 minutes to conduct. The interview will be tape recorded. It would need to be mutually determined when and where the interview would take place. I am prepared to meet at a time and a place that causes the least disruption and inconvenience to you.

As a compulsory element of the ACU Ethics Committee details such as the name of those interviewed, name of schools or any information, which enables schools to be recognised, are not permitted. Confidentiality is required and ensured by legislation. The substance of the interviews will be used in the thesis but there is no form of identification of where the information and ideas are obtained.

The research will be of benefit to individuals, schools and to the Catholic system as a whole in examining Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in secondary schools. It is expected that findings will also be of benefit to the people fulfilling these very important roles in schools.

I've attached an outline of the project and consent forms for you to return to me.

G.P. [Joe] Fleming Australian Catholic University Christ Campus 17 Castlebar Road Oakleigh 3166

CONSENT FORM FOR THE COORDINATOR <u>WHO IS BEING INTERVIEWED</u>

TITLE OF PROJECT: Investigation into Secondary Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR MR. G. P. [Joe] FLEMING

The purpose of the study is to explore the development of Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in Catholic secondary schools from 1982-1998.

Those choosing to participate in the interview will be inconvenienced only in terms of the time for the interview. I will travel to your workplace or a place of your choice. The time required for the interview will be 60-90 minutes.

The research will have benefits for Catholic Education and for those who are in these leadership roles in schools.

You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

If there are any questions that you have about the project and the interview please contact me:

Telephone number work. 9563 3641   home 5244 3784

*and/or one of the Supervisors: Dr Phil Clarkson, Dr. Kath Engebretson on teleph<u>one</u> <u>number.*9241 4400</u>*

Full Campus Address ACU Mercy Campus, Ascot Vale.

This study has been approved by the University Research Projects Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne - see attached letters.

In the event that you have any complaint about the way you or your staff member have been treated during the study, or a query that the Investigator has not been able to satisfy, you may write care of the nearest branch of the Office of Research

Chair, University Research Projects Ethics Committee
C/o Office of Research
Australian Catholic University
412 Mt Alexander Road Ascot
Vale VIC 3032
Tel: 03 9241 4513
Fax: 03 9241 4529

Any complaint made will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and the participant informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Informed Consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Investigator.

COORDINATOR'S
CONSENT FORM RETURN SHEET

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Investigation into Secondary Religious Education Coordinators and Faith Development Coordinators in the archdiocese of Melbourne

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR: MR. G. P. [Joe] FLEMING

I have read and understood the information provided in the letter and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I'm prepared to be interviewed.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the school or the individual.

NAME ....

NAME OF SCHOOL: ....

SIGNATURE: ....

DATE: ....

Please return to:

Mr. G. P.[Joe] Fleming Australian Catholic University 17 Castlebar Road Oakleigh 3166

Appendix 67

Letter to RECs prior to their interview

To: Religious Education Coordinator

From: G. P. [Joe] Fleming

RE: Interview

I thank-you very much for agreeing to participate in a taped interview. I am very much looking forward to talking with you about this very important role within the Catholic secondary school setting. As was stated, in previous correspondence, I want to reassure you that your anonymity and that of the school is guaranteed and that what you say can in no way be traced to you or your school situation.

So that there are no surprises about the process and content of the interview I would outline what is going to occur. The entire process will last from 60-90 minutes, this includes the physical setting up, interviewing and closing down, with the interview itself taking about 45-60 minutes. There are no set questions, or order of questions. The questions will flow out of the discussion itself what I am interested in most is hearing and engaging in your story. The interview itself will be semi-structured around themes and ideas that form the boundaries or limits of the discussion. These themes and ideas are:

What was it that prompted you to move into the role of REC?
What keeps you there?
What was it that made you move on?

What are the pluses and minuses of the role?
What are the greatest pressures?
What do you think of the REC/FDC development?
How has the role changed over the years?
What have been the key formational documents/professional development activities that you have experienced?
Role of the CEO, Networks, Sponsorship. Professional Development
Support structures in schools?
RE staff and expertise

Theory of RE - key developments
Guidelines - Melbourne and others
Text books
Church and Theology and REC

Appendix 19

Copy of mapping of one category of findings
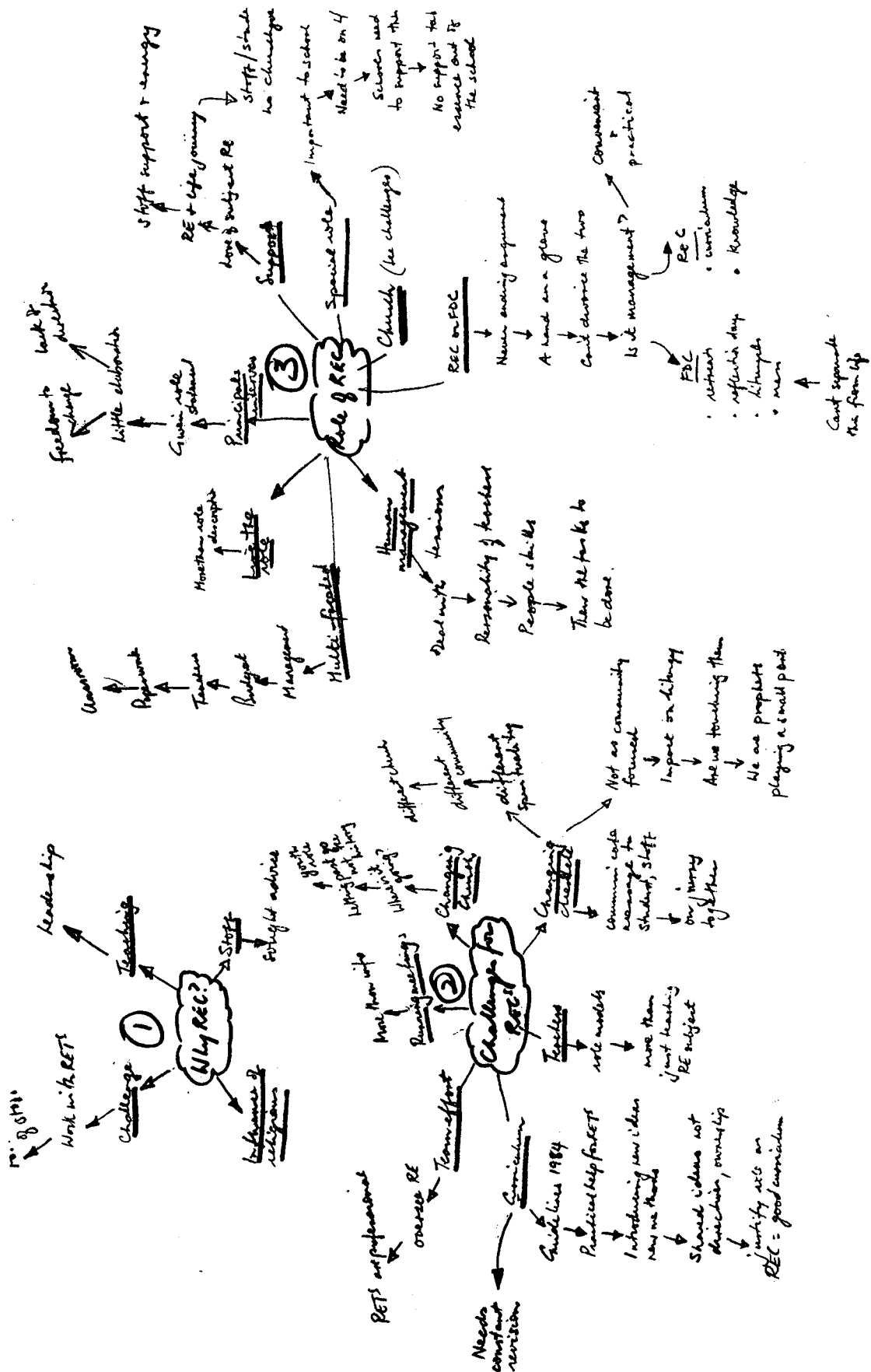
Appendix 69

Ethical approval from ACU Ethics Committee

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

To:

Assoc Prof Philip Clarkson, Mercy Campus

Cc Executive Officer, University Research Projects Ethics Committee.

Froth: Ga **Filby, Office** of Research   Telephone: ext 4451

Sped Dial Fax: 4529   **E-mail: g.filby@mercy.acu.edu.au**

SUBJECT: Ethics Clearance Approval Form - Mr GeWd Fleming
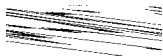
Date: 8 April, 1999

Please find **attached** your approval form for ethics clearance *from the* **University** Research Projects Ethics Committee.

It would be appreciated if' you and the student would sign and return the form to the Office of Research as soon as possible, to be included in the NHMRC Register of approved projects.

Should you have ony queries, do not hesitate to **contact me on ext. 4451.**

Yours sincerely.

Gay Filby

Administrative Officer (Research),

(Our Red: elhdred dm)

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