

PARENTS, TEACHERS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.  
A Study in a Catholic Secondary School in Rural Victoria.

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## Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published or extracted in whole or 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.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics / Safety Committee of Australian Catholic University.

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## ABSTRACT

The research reported in this thesis investigated perceptions about the nature and purpose of religious education of parents and teachers in a study of one Catholic secondary school in regional Victoria, Australia. In the research project data were collected using questionnaires and interviews from parents and teachers of religious education associated with the particular secondary school.

These data were analysed and interpreted against a spectrum of purposes for religious education that were drawn from the literature. The literature reviewed included documents relevant to religious education from the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and also from theorists in the field of religious education both from Australia and beyond.

The theories about religious education generated by the literature review provided a framework within which to compare and contrast how the parents and the teachers understood religious education. While all of the religious education teachers took part in the research, the parents self-selected. This meant that those who responded were mostly Catholic from a school where there were 23% of families with no Catholic parent. A decision was made to focus this study on the new Catholic religious education guidelines, since this was seen to be essential because of the mandate by the bishop and Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Ballarat. All parents were invited to respond, but mostly Catholic parent did.

It was discovered that the parents and the teachers were in agreement in relation to most areas of religious education, especially in areas associated with values, morality, individual spirituality and what might be termed 'religious literacy'. Parents and teachers were shown to have different attitudes towards religious education in the senior school. The data also highlighted the importance of the role of the teachers and school in providing religious education for families who have become distanced from traditional religious

institutions. Many of the parents endorsed the school as the primary place for their children to receive information about religion, and chose to distance themselves from the religious education process in favour of allowing the 'experts' at the school to take on this role on behalf of the family. The thesis raised issues for the ways in which the school communicated with parents, both in terminology and technology. Overall, the findings affirmed the work of the teachers in religious education by parents who were 'time poor' and who wished to see the school take on the primary role of educating the children about religion, with expectations that the children would be fully exposed to the Catholic religious tradition in its teachings, ethics, liturgy and social justice practices.

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

AREFC	<i>Australian Religious Education: Facing the Challenges</i>
B Theol	Bachelor of Theology
BCA	Business Council of Australia
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church)
CDB	Catholic Diocese of Ballarat
CEOM	Catholic Education Office, Melbourne
CS	<i>The Catholic School</i>
CSAM	<i>Catholics who have Stopped Attending Mass</i>
CSC	<i>Catholic Schools at a Crossroads</i>
CSF II	<i>Curriculum Standards Framework II</i>
CSTTM	<i>The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium</i>
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> (Catechesis in Our Time)
DAS	<i>Divino Afflante Spiritu</i>
Dip Ed	Diploma of Education
DRE	Director of Religious Education
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> (On Evangelization in the Modern World)
ENTER	Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank
GCD	<i>General Catechetical Directory</i>
GDC	<i>General Directory of Catechesis</i>
GE	<i>Gravissimum Educationis</i> (Declaration on Christian Education)
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)
Guidelines	<i>Guidelines for Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne</i>
IHTG	<i>Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels</i>
KLA	Key Learning Area
LCS	<i>Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith</i>
Master RE	Master of Religious Education

MRCC	Mildura Rural City Council
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
NCLS	National Life Church Survey
NMI	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> , (At the Beginning of the Third Millennium)
PBC	Pontifical Biblical Commission
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
RDECS	<i>Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School</i>
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Co-ordinator
RE Cert	Certificate of Religious Education
REF	<i>Renewal of the Education of Faith</i>
RE Grad Dip	Graduate Diploma in Religious Education
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate)
SADECS	South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services
SCC	Sacred Congregation for the Clergy
SCP	Shared Christian Praxis
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education

NB: Throughout this thesis the dates for the Second Vatican Council are given as 1962-1965.

While it is acknowledged that the Council had numerous sessions over two pontificates, these dates are those that are commonly given with the Council beginning on October 11, 1962 and ending on December 8, 1965.

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## CHAPTER ONE: SCOPE AND PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

### Introduction

Within Australia in recent years, there has been much debate and public discussion about the role of education. Politicians, business leaders, parents and educationalists have all expressed particular views about what should be expected of the education system:

Brumby, Pike & Morand (2008); Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Government of Victoria. (2009); Department of Education and Children's Services, Government of South Australia (2008a, 2008b); Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008); Nelson, (2005a, 2005b); Business Council of Australia (2007); Nelson and Downer (2003). There has been public discussion comparing educational standards with those of other countries and between Australian states (Nelson, 2005a; 2005b).

One significant recent movement in Australian education has been towards the development of a values-based component in education (Curriculum Corporation, 2003). While values education programs in the classroom have had only a very small and comparatively insignificant place in public education (Hill, 1991, 2004, 2005), they have long been a distinct aspect of Catholic education in Australia, particularly in the form of religious education which is supported by 'gospel values'<sup>1</sup> in policy and curriculum (Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, 2005). Religious education is regarded as central to the *raison d'être* of Catholic schools. It has always been a part of the core curriculum at all

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<sup>1</sup> 'Gospel values' refers to the commonly acknowledged Christian values associated with Jesus Christ in the Christian gospels. These include compassion, justice, forgiveness, respect, human dignity, hospitality, service to others.

year levels and there has been substantial support for religious education from Catholic Education Offices. This support in the various Catholic dioceses has been in the form of curriculum guidelines, support documents and extensive professional development programs for teachers of religious education.

While there have been debates about standardised learning outcomes in Key Learning Areas<sup>2</sup> [KLA] such as English, Science and Mathematics, there has been much less attention given to the outcomes of religious education in educational discussion in Australian Catholic schools. Given the official importance of religious education in normative documentation for Catholic school curricula, this apparent lack of attention warranted investigation.

The lack of discussion about determining measurable outcomes in religious education may be because its purposes include the development of religious faith and spirituality, as well as religious knowledge and skills. While parents and teachers may have embraced Catholic schools, the low level of interest in the formal practice of religion in Australian society may also apply to them, such that there is not a strong interest in religious outcomes in contrast with performance in the general curriculum, which is seen as more pertinent to future career, education and jobs. In addition, there is a degree of confusion of purposes in religious education that in part is related to the natural complexity of any area of curriculum that is concerned with trying to foster personal change in beliefs, values and attitudes. This problem could affect the expectations and level of interest of both teachers and parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Key Learning Area (KLA) is a term used in Victorian education to describe the domain or subject area such as Mathematics, Science, the Arts, and English. Within the school the study of religious education is deemed to be a KLA as this subject carries particular importance within the Catholic school.

In the experience of the researcher, parents and Catholic secondary schools have maintained a strong focus on final year results and on state-wide achievement scales, while religious education has been treated in a different way. The researcher has noted that parents have tended to leave the principal concerns about religious education up to the schools, which generated programs that set out to address the religious, values and moral development of students.

In recent years, there has been a growth in the attention given to research into religious education in the Australian context. Publications such as the *Journal of Religious Education* have presented an increasing number of findings from Australian research, particularly as it has affected Catholic schools. Researchers such as Engebretson (1999, 2001); De Souza (1999, 2003); Buchanan (2003, 2007); English (2004); Crawford and Rossiter (2006); Dwyer (1986); Rossiter (1999, 2002, 2004); Rymarz (2003); Ryan (1997); Malone and Ryan (1996) and others have provided an extensive range of studies into various aspects of religious education relating to the nature and purpose of religious education in Australia, and in Catholic schools in particular.

However, despite this increased research, there has been no systematic study of what views parents have about religious education in Catholic schools. This is the case even though the documents of the Catholic Church have consistently affirmed the primary importance of parents as the 'first educators' of their children (John Paul II, 1979). In addition most, if not all, Catholic schools have in their documentation the stated aim of being in partnership with parents in the education of the children. The documentation of the diocese of the school in which this research was conducted, *Awakenings* (Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, [CDB], 2005), explicitly noted the importance of this partnership.

As an educational leader involved in stages of the development of these Guidelines, it became clear to this researcher that there was little consultation with parents during their

development. This appeared to be an oversight in the process of development of documents that were meant to foster and enhance partnership with families. Hence, this researcher considered it appropriate to investigate what parents of students in his secondary school knew about religious education, their expectations of the religious education curriculum and how they viewed the importance of all facets of religious education within the school.

Having taught in both primary and secondary Catholic schools, the researcher was aware of a lack of opportunities for engagement of parents in the secondary school compared with opportunities for dialogue and involvement in the primary school. In addition, as an experienced teacher and leader of religious education within the school, the researcher was aware of anecdotal evidence suggesting that teachers, and some parents, thought that many parents were not interested in the religious education curriculum in the secondary school.

While doctoral research in religious education, such as that of Fleming (2002) and Buchanan (2007), has investigated the views of teachers about their roles in subject coordination and curriculum development, little empirical research has been directed specifically at teachers' understanding of the nature and purposes of religious education. There are, however, three current studies being conducted in Australian Catholic University on this topic (Wanden, 2008; Whitelaw, 2008).

It might be expected that teachers' thinking about purposes and practice in religious education might be correlated with normative (official) views of religious education in the relevant Church documents underpinning religious education. However, as yet, this has not been tested systematically by research.

There are indications that there may be a level of ambiguity and confusion of purposes in teachers' understanding of religious education. For example, Crawford and Rossiter

(1985) considered that teachers were puzzled to some extent by the many and complicated expectations that came from language constructs that were used in Church documents such as catechesis, evangelisation, pre-evangelisation, ministry, mission, witness, etc. In addition, since the 1960s, there has been considerable change in both the theory and practice of classroom religious education in Catholic schools in Australia, and in other countries (Rossiter, 1981, 1999; Buchanan, 2003; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). Over the years, teachers of religious education in Catholic schools, as well as those in authority who authored curriculum statements have tried to respond to new needs and changing contexts and this has resulted in changes in approaches to teaching (Engebretson, Fleming, & Rymarz, 2002; English, 2002; Groome and Horrell, 2003). The extent and rapidity of the changes have caused problems for teachers in regard to purposes and pedagogy in religious education (Crawford and Rossiter, 1985). As yet there is no empirical research information about this problem.

This study has taken the opportunity of investigating understandings of the nature and purposes of Catholic school religious education on the parts of both teachers and parents.

## Issues Related to Teachers' and Parents' Understandings of the Nature and Purposes of Catholic School Religious Education

### *Ambiguity about the Purposes of Religious Education to bring about Personal Change in Pupils*

In a major study, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) analysed past developments and a projected future for religious education within the broad perspective of the spiritual and moral dimension of the school curriculum. They noted that in any curriculum area

concerned with promoting personal change in pupils, in addition to advancing knowledge and skills in areas such as religion, philosophy, ethics or personal development, there was a natural tendency to expect too much of the school curriculum in changing pupils' beliefs, attitudes and values. Hence, teaching to promote personal change would probably always be problematic for community expectations because of the extent and complexity of links between classroom teaching activities and actual personal change in pupils. Authentic personal change needed to be based on freedom and personal choice (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, pp. 255-295).

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) noted, citing empirical evidence from the Australian National Values Education Study (Curriculum Corporation, 2003), that parents tended to have greater expectations of the school in promoting personal and spiritual development in young people than either teachers, or the students themselves (pp. 259-261). How this might apply to the views of parents and teachers in Catholic schools is yet to be investigated empirically. Ambiguities arose as to the purposes of religious education, both on the part of teachers and parents. For example, there were different views as to the most appropriate emphasis in the religious education curriculum:- for personal faith development; for academic study of one or more religious traditions; or for the development of values and morality (Rossiter, 2004).

Since the late 1970s, the construct 'faith development' has become the most prominent and influential term for describing the purposes of Catholic religious education. However, as pointed out by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 409-433), there are a number of ambiguities and problems created by a tendency to equate this personal and complicated process with particular experiences in religious education.

### *Changing Profile of the Student Population in Catholic Schools*

At a time when more and more students are coming to Catholic schools from families who are not actively engaged with the Catholic Church structures and activities, there is a need to adjust the religious education curriculum to take this into account. The changing student profile is also affected by the increasing numbers of pupils who are not Catholic. For example, Table 1.1 shows that in 2006 the percentage of students who were not Catholic in Victorian Catholic schools was 22%. The percentage in rural / regional schools is usually higher than the state average.

*Table 1.1 Enrolments of students in Australian Catholic schools 2007*

<b>States and Territories</b>	<b>Non-Catholic Students</b>		<b>Catholic Students</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of</b>
Australian Capital Territory	4,611	27%	12,698	73%
New South Wales	47,940	20%	191,334	80%
Northern Territory	2,040	40%	3,105	60%
Queensland	37,581	31%	84,022	69%
South Australia	17,506	37%	29,685	63%
Tasmania	6,100	44%	7,852	56%
Victoria	40,446	22%	144,236	78%
Western Australia	14,266	22%	49,357	78%
Australia	170,551	25%	522,243	75%

(National Catholic Education Commission, [NCEC], 2008)

Research on the views of parents on this question would help to show how religious education is seen by both the practising Catholic parents and those who do not have an active contact with the tradition. It would also indicate how those who were not Catholic regarded religious education. In addition, there is a need to research the views of both teachers and parents about how to address the changing clientele of the students in Catholic schools in terms of the content of the religious education curriculum as well as in religious practice.

*Parental Responsibility for Children's Education: Implications for Curriculum*

The involvement of parents in education, generally, has been considered in both Catholic and state education documents (Department of Education and Child Services, Government of South Australia, 2008b; Department of Education, Government of Tasmania, 2008; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Government of Victoria, 2008; CDB, 2005). There was an emphasis on the benefits of partnership between parents and school in the academic and personal development of students. In religious education, there was an emphasis on the importance of parents in the faith development of the child (CDB, 2005; Ryan, 1997). The role of parents was referred to only in very general terms such as partnership and overall responsibility for children's spiritual development. In most schools, teachers, in the light of authoritative statements, developed and implemented the religious education curriculum, but parents were often not included in the discussions related to this development and implementation. Their views were not sought on the purposes of religious education.

There remained a level of ambiguity and uncertainty in the clarification of the roles and expectations of parents with respect to the religious education curriculum of the Catholic school (Constable, 1992). There has been limited research about whether parents and / or teachers actually wanted to build better relationships and partnerships in regard to their respective roles in the religious education of young people. Similarly, there are no data on whether they believed that current relationships between the home and school were effective.

The Catholic Church has placed a high priority on the provision of Catholic schooling (Abbott, *Gravissimum Educationis*, [GE], 1965). It seems apparent that, to make the religious dimension of the schools effective, there needs to be a high level of co-operation between parents and schools. While the overall responsibility of parents for the

education of their children is not in question, what this responsibility means for the development of curriculum in the school remains an open and puzzling issue. Questions arise such as whether this parental responsibility gives parents a right to influence the content of curriculum in any subject area, religion included. Whether parents need to have access to information about curriculum, including religious education, remains an issue. Also in question is whether the structuring and pedagogy of curriculum should remain the relatively exclusive responsibility of teachers and the relevant education authorities. Further, there is the question of what is an appropriate partnership between parents and teachers in regard to religious education that respects the distinctive and complementary roles of both parents and teachers.

The issues noted above are investigated in this study, both in documentary analysis and through empirical research.

#### *Comparisons and Contrasts between the Views of Teachers and Parents on Religious Education*

The issues considered above suggest that the complexity of the links between the practice of religious education and potential personal influence on pupils' religious faith and spirituality, make it understandable that there would be a natural level of uncertainty and ambiguity in discussion about the purposes and outcomes of Catholic school religious education in the classroom. From bishops, clergy, education authorities, teachers to parents, it remains a difficult task to clarify and articulate the purposes of religious education. A key part of this clarification is the respective roles of home and school.

What parents and teachers expect of religious education is no doubt influenced by their own personal experience of religious education lessons while they were at school, as well as by their experience in society, study and other factors. However, up until now

there has been no research that has compared and contrasted the views of teachers and parents about religious education in Catholic schools, yet both are significant in the Catholic education system. There is a need to highlight the areas of agreement, areas of disagreement and areas where there is ambivalence. This assists an examination of the partnership between home, school and Church and is valuable for the Catholic school system in planning parent education programs and teacher professional development programs.

### Scope and Purposes of this Research Study

This research study addressed the issues considered above by undertaking a two part investigation of the views of teachers and parents about the nature and purposes of religious education. The first part is a documentary and philosophical analysis of the nature and purposes of religious education in Catholic secondary schools. It examines normative Catholic Church documents at Vatican and local Australian levels as well as the works of individual theorists. This provides an interpretative background or a spectrum of purposes in the light of which the second part of the study is conducted. The second part of the study consists of an investigation of the views of both teachers and parents.

Through questionnaires and interviews in one large Catholic secondary school in regional Victoria, the understandings of all the teachers of religious education and of a substantial sample of parents were gathered. Comparisons of responses were made through the use of many of the same questions in the questionnaires for teachers and parents. This study therefore attempts to fill an important gap in current research on religious education by addressing the degree of congruence between the views of parents and teachers in regard to their expectations of religious education. It should be pointed out that parents self-selected in their responses to requests to complete questionnaires and take part in

interviews. It can be assumed that those who did so had some interest in religious education. Therefore, the conclusion cannot be drawn that they were indicative of parent groups in Catholic schools in general. Nevertheless, there is enough research on Australian values and culture to suggest that even these parents would have much in common with the wider group of parents who send their children to Catholic schools (Hughes, 2006).

### *Key Research Questions*

A number of key questions guided the research:

- How do both teachers and parents understand the nature and purposes of religious education?

Sub-questions related to this were:-

What appear to be their most important perceived goals?

What are the words they think are most important for describing purposes?

How do the views of teachers and parents about religious education stand with respect to the normative views articulated in official curriculum statements and Church documents?

What particular emphases do they see as important in religious education?

What are the problem areas in their understandings of religious education?

- How do teachers and parents understand the complementary role of school and home in young people's religious education?

Sub-questions related to this were:-

Do teachers perceive a lack of support for religious education from parents generally?

To what extent is there a quality partnership between the school and the parents in the area of religious education?

- The findings of the research inform recommendations related to the following questions:-

How might parents be better engaged with the religious education process of the school?

How might the school better keep parents up to date on developments in religious education curriculum?

How might greater dialogue with parents about the nature and purposes of religious education, and of the role of Catholic school in general be promoted?

#### *Potential Significance of this Research*

A research study of the views of both teachers and parents contributes new information in an area of Australian Catholic school religious education which has received very little attention. This introductory study has the potential to open up this area for further research. This research is also important because in times of diminishing parental and student contact with the local Church (National Church Life Survey, [NCLS], 2006), research that clarifies and fosters cooperation between parents and teachers with respect to the aims of religious education could enhance relationships with the Church. There is the opportunity of enhancing the achievement of the purposes of religious education espoused in Catholic Church documentation related to religious education. The research provides for an examination of the way that parents and teachers see the role of parents in religious education curriculum planning. There is also a clarification of the complementary roles of

parents and teachers in young people's overall religious education. This could also maximise co-operation between school and parents in regard to the school's contribution.

*Outline of the Purpose, Structure and Content of the Remaining Chapters of this Thesis*

The first documentary analytical part of the study is reported in chapters two and three. Chapter two describes the background and immediate context of this study. It describes the school which was the focus of the research, its clientele, and both its academic and religious orientations. In addition it covers the religious education curriculum currently operating in the school. Chapter three provides a review of the literature on the nature and purposes of Catholic school religious education, and of the roles of teachers and parents in young people's religious education. This review served to develop an interpretative framework that has two purposes. Firstly, it identified insights into the research questions about the understandings of teachers and parents. It identified a range of issues and problems that were associated with the views of parents and teachers, particularly with respect to the teacher-parent partnership that was regarded as important for Catholic schooling. Secondly, it summarised the normative purposes for Catholic Religious education in official documents (at both the levels of Roman and Australian Church documents, and local diocesan statements), together with the interpretations of key theorists who have contributed to the thinking of Australian Catholic religious educators. This analysis provided a spectrum of purposes in the light of which the empirical data from part 2 of the study was analysed and interpreted. Chapter four explains the methodology of the research project, which was based on 'mixed methods' using both questionnaires and interviews. The study was underpinned by a constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective. It provides details of the data collection instruments and mode of analysis of the data.

Then follow two chapters which report on the data collection. Chapter five presents the responses of parents to questionnaires and interviews. Chapter six reports the findings from the questionnaires and interviews for teachers. Chapter seven discusses the meaning and significance of the results reported in the previous two chapters. In particular it comments on comparisons and contrasts between the responses of teachers and parents. Chapter eight draws conclusions for religious education in the light of the whole study. It proposes implications for Catholic religious education in a number of areas, including addressing issues related to the partnership between school and parents and offers suggestions for related teacher professional development.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the context of the research reported in this thesis, beginning with a description of the school that was the focus of the research. An extensive description of the school population is provided to inform interpretation of the teachers' and parents' comments about religious education in the school, which has particular geographical and social characteristics that are pertinent to this research. At the time that the research was conceived, the school community was under duress due to economic pressures arising from its location. It was deemed that these pressures were likely to affect what parents and teachers expected of religious education in terms of developing personal skills, spirituality and community-oriented outcomes. Information about the place of religious education in the school is provided in this chapter because it gives important background to developments in religious education within the diocese and the school, and helps the reader to understand the structures that affected the implementation of the new diocesan religious education Guidelines.

It is also deemed relevant to discuss developments within the Catholic Church, since many teachers and parents have been influenced by these changes and their attitudes and expectations of religious education may well reflect their responses to these developments. Many parents have had little contact with the Church, and religious education in the school could be their only interaction with organised religion. The section on the new diocesan religious education guidelines, (CDB, 2005), is provided as background to what is currently being developed and taught within the school in religious education.

Further to these important elements is the realisation that within Australia there have been a variety of developments that have influenced the context in which religious education is provided within Catholic schools. There have been aspects of a widespread globalised secularism, materialism and individualism characteristic within Australian society that has also been evident in many modern societies (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1998; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Skeie, 2006). Secularisation, which is accompanied by a general privatisation of religion and a lessening of the influence of religion on society, has created challenges as traditional religions such as Christianity must compete with values which may not be consistent with those of the religious tradition. “Secularisation implied that religion did not have a monopoly on spirituality” (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p.180). This has been a factor in the decline in Church influence in society since the 1960s. Society contains people who vary from strong religious affiliation and adherence to religious teachings, through to those who reject religion completely and those who mix religious and non-religious or multi-religious components. A similar mix could reasonably be expected in the parent population of the school which was the focus of the research. Some influences of secularisation are almost certainly present in the teacher cohort.

Consumerism, or a focus on material possessions, has become a major influence on how young people see themselves (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006), as advertising and societal expectations place a high value on possessions and financial advancement as indicators of success in contemporary society. This has an influence on the value that students place on religious education in the senior school, when the focus is on academic success as criteria for further study and advancement towards financially successful careers. The information technology that dominates the lives of most young people constantly presents advertising as complementary to other activities such as social

networking and information gathering resources. Here, those advocating the consumerist society target the needs of youth for “identity externals” (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 132), which are statements related to their self-expressions of their individual identity, even if, in fact, this image is a widely shared identity among their peers.

Individualism and relativism (Smith, 2006) create a focus on the individual, and what the individual believes, rather than on the individual as part of the community, or community of believers. This places pressure on the Christian teachings related to consideration for others and their beliefs, rather than the self-interest that can result from individualistic values, beliefs and practices. Teaching about morality in a post-modern world has become increasingly complex and confusing for many Christians as new issues arise associated with the natural environment, health issues, the law and many other facets of contemporary society (Horrell, 2006). Similarly, the developing multi-faith (Skeie, 2006) nature of Australian society, places many competing faith and values systems in front of students. This can result in confusion and can lead to challenges for the Catholic school in presenting Christian values and beliefs (Welbourne, 2003, 2004).

Australian parents, students and teachers are affected by these cultural elements which challenge traditional religion and religious education. They have been an influence in the “drift” (Skeie, 2006) away from traditional Churches and towards a personalised, privatised faith. Hughes (2006) suggested that there were signs of a changing religious presence rather than religion disappearing. The need for religious education to assist with a critique of these secular and globalised developments is examined in this chapter and Chapter 2.

### Description of the School

The Catholic secondary school which was the site of the research reported in this thesis was a co-educational school of 800 students in rural/regional Victoria, Australia. The

students were drawn from a range of Catholic, government and non-government primary schools. These feeder schools were located within the major rural centre and beyond this in the surrounding townships and small rural schools. The school had a history of approximately 100 years of Catholic education in the district. It was the only Catholic secondary school in the area and was the only non-government secondary school to offer Years 7 to 12, that is, the six years of secondary schooling. The school had a strong reputation within the community for high quality education and for providing Catholic religious education. It has had a range of students from Catholic and other religious traditions since the commencement of the school. At the time of the research, the religious denominations represented among the student population included Catholics, orthodox Christians, other Christians (Uniting Church, Anglican, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian), Muslims, Hindus, and those with no religious affiliation. Details of the religious background of families are found in Appendix A.

Many teachers and parents would have been educated in Catholic school communities during a period when these were staffed predominantly by teachers who had taken religious vows (religious sisters, brothers and priests). This may have been a significant influence on the way they experienced and now remember religious education. Today the situation is different with most Catholic schools being staffed completely by lay teachers. A further change relevant to this research has been the growth of the Catholic school in its student and family numbers.

Within the local region, Catholic education has had a strong history of provision of primary and secondary schooling for over 100 years. However, the numbers of students attending the secondary school have increased substantially, especially in the past 15 years, during which numbers have grown from 500 in the early 1990s to the 2006 enrolment of 860. There was a slight decrease in 2007 and a further decrease in 2008 to

the student population of 790 (see Appendix B), possibly due to financial factors associated with the drought and water shortage<sup>3</sup>. This growth and fall have brought about a range of developments that have had an impact on the students and parents of the school. These developments include a greater variation in the religious affiliation of students and staff, a greater diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of students and issues surrounding the employment of staff within the Catholic school. The school has always opened its doors to students from any religious tradition during its 100 year history, but, the majority of students were practising Catholics until relatively recent times. At the time of the research, there were students from a range of Christian and non-Christian faith traditions alongside students who claimed no religious affiliation.

Many of the students who attended the school had parents and/or grandparents who had also attended the school, which was established by the Sisters of Mercy 100 years ago. The Catholic ethos of the school was strongly influenced by the local interpretation of the Mercy tradition as part of Mercy Secondary Education Incorporated, [MSEI], (1998). As part of this tradition, the school charged fees closely aligned with the lowest in the state for Catholic secondary education. There were also provisions for supporting families who had difficulty in meeting financial commitments. The religious congregation that sponsored the school, the Melbourne Mercy Congregation through MSEI, was committed to the provision of Catholic education for all students who sought it.

The school had a teaching staff of approximately 85 full or part-time teachers, of whom 17 were engaged in teaching religious education at any one time, while a

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<sup>3</sup> The school is located on a major inland river which is the source of agricultural and domestic water for the region. Preceding 2008 there had been a number of low rainfall years in the river catchment areas and in the local area. This resulted in significant water restrictions for both domestic and agricultural use. The economic flow-on from this had severe effects on many farming, business and employee incomes.

number of others had experience in religious education in the past. It was situated over 400 kilometres from any major regional or metropolitan centre and as such was affected by factors associated with isolation from cultural and educational opportunities available in the larger population centres. This same isolation may have had an influence on the parental expectations of the school and religious education. The school was susceptible to a range of factors affecting life in regional Australia (Pritchard & McMannus, 2000). This regional centre had been, and continued to be, in a state of expansion. Population was increasing, commercial and business precincts were expanding, although there were economic pressures on the agricultural sector that were in turn affecting local businesses.

The projections for the next 25 years were for a doubling of the population of this regional centre (Mildura Rural City Council, [MRCC], 2006). The primary reasons for this expansion were considered to be tourism and retirement. The local agriculture, horticulture and tourism industries were developing. However, the local agriculture was dependent on weather patterns that had been erratic, with low rainfall in recent years placing much stress on the farming community. The availability of water was the cause of much stress and anxiety as low rains in catchment areas had reduced the amount of water available for irrigation of citrus, grapes, vegetables and other high yielding fruits.

Negative market forces had directly or indirectly affected many of the students and parents, although this could also be true to a similar extent in metropolitan areas. Economic and social factors and changes were seriously challenging traditional community structures in regional areas of Australia generally and in particular in the social context of the school in the research study. The school had been subject to these pressures with some students being withdrawn from the school due to the cost of

fees, despite reassurances that arrangements could be made to accommodate their financial hardship. Personal pride appeared to stop families, who had never needed to seek financial support in the past, from accepting this offer of assistance.

### Religious Education within the School

Religious education was part of the formal curriculum of the school with all students offered the opportunity for participation in the other facets of religious education such as social justice groups and liturgy preparation groups. Within the school, the Principal delegated to the Director of Religious Education (DRE) the specific responsibility for the religious education curriculum (Fleming, 2002, 2004). The DRE worked closely with the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and the Curriculum Co-ordinator to plan and support the religious education curriculum as it was offered at each year level. The DRE also had responsibility to oversee the establishment of documentation for teachers based on the current Ballarat diocesan approved religious education guidelines, *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005), whose context is discussed elsewhere in this and the next chapter.

### Approaches to Religious Education which may have affected this Study

Parents and teachers would have been exposed to a variety of approaches to religious education if they had attended Catholic schools, and this may have affected their current expectations of the religious education curriculum. Many of these approaches are described in the following chapter. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which is the period relevant to the parents and teachers who took part in this

research, the CDB has closely aligned its religious education curriculum with the approach take by the Archdiocese of Melbourne, because of the resources and expertise in religious education present in the Archdiocese and the lack of comprehensive educational resources in the Ballarat diocese. The key Melbourne archdiocesan documents began with the *Guidelines for Religious Education for Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne [CEOM], 1973) in six volumes, one for each year of secondary school. This continued with updates and developments of the Guidelines until the *1995 Guidelines for Religious Education of Secondary Students* (CEOM, 1995), fully revised edition in three volumes: Junior, Middle and Senior Secondary.

These Religious Education Guidelines (1973, 1984, 1995) were developed in response to the directive to bishops from the Second Vatican Council to generate religious education materials and programs to suit the students in their dioceses (Abbott, [GE], 1965). This has led to a much greater role for the Catholic Education Office in the Ballarat diocese, and for its later established Religious Education Centre, which has been instrumental in developing and supporting religious education programs in the diocese. The Centre has provided personnel to assist schools, resource centres for schools to access the latest educational materials and policy and curriculum guidance. This alignment with the Archdiocese of Melbourne changed in 2005 when the diocese of Ballarat published its own religious education guidelines document, *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005), to be used in all Ballarat diocesan schools, primary and secondary. The curriculum was a collaborative effort of the country dioceses of Victoria, and the Archdioceses of Hobart.

The new curriculum was build upon reflection on the Diocese of Paramatta and Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn religious education Guidelines<sup>4</sup>. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) adopted the SCP approach to religious education (Groome, 1980), a methodology in religious education based on a theoretical understanding of religious education as predominantly education in faith and using a praxis approach to pedagogy.

The history of this approach and some analysis of it are given in the literature review provided in Chapter two of this thesis. The parents and teachers who took part in this research study would not have themselves experienced this methodology in their schooling.

The introduction of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) was accompanied by a school-wide staff induction into the principles of the document and by ongoing religious education staff resources and documentation. It was hailed by the diocese as a major initiative and source of renewal of religious education in Catholic schools. Against this background of the implementation of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) in the school, the research reported in this thesis attempted to discover what, if any, correlation existed between the perceptions of religious education of parents and teachers. The chapter that follows provides a comprehensive literature review which provides a framework against which the findings can be analysed.

#### The Parents and Teachers who took part in the Research

Many of the parents and teachers who took part in this research have lived through a time of great social change in which religious values and practices have been

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<sup>4</sup> The Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn (2000) religious education guidelines were *Treasures New and Old*; the Parramatta religious education guidelines were *Sharing Our Story* (Diocese of Parramatta, 2007).

challenged, and where traditional beliefs and expectations have been rejected by many, or put to the side by those people who wish to create their own individualized religious and spiritual framework. Many of the parents who took part in the research did not at that time have active membership of traditional Catholic or Christian communities. This may have been influenced by the increase in interest in personalized faith and values (Hughes, 2007).

The parents who took part in this research may not have been representative of the parent group in the school as a whole. The parents who responded were probably those who were interested in religious education. For large numbers of parents the religious education curriculum is not the reason for their choice of a particular school. Many of these parents would have grown up in a social situation where children followed their parents' religious affiliation. At the time of this research, they were possibly engendering their children with the opportunity for choice at a much younger age. As such, the parents may have been expecting the school to provide the means by which the children could make informed choices as they made up their own minds about faith, spirituality, morality and values. It was not that these aspects of human life were not important; it may have been that the parents wanted to give their children the freedom and ability to choose their own religious culture and identity.

In light of this, Hughes (1997, 2002) suggested that Australia had become such a multi-cultural environment in which religious traditions and culture had come under strong pressure to change. The great increase in choices across a range of cultural dimensions was reflected in the way that many Australians were increasingly willing to choose from a range of cultural and religious traditions to create their own culture or faith tradition, including beliefs, practices and values. Tacey acknowledged the dimension of spirituality basic to all humanity (Tacey, 1995, 2000, 2003), but noted

that, for some the expression of this deeper search for meaning and connectedness was changing due to movement within society towards individuals seeking their own personalized “religion”. He was critical of the established Christian churches for not being prepared to engage with the people who were seeking new expressions of religious belief that would be relevant to the changing social framework in Australia (Tacey, 2003). Some of the parents and teachers in this study could have been affected by these trends in society.

In the school in this study, Christian and non-Christian parents selected the school after an interview process that explained that the religious education in the school was predominantly Christian and compulsory. The school religious education policy acknowledges that there are families of varying faiths and welcomes and respects these within the known parameters of the ethos and teachings of the Catholic school. The religious education of the school attempts to support non-Christian students in their faith development, while encouraging all students to respect all faiths. It was not the purpose of this study to investigate approaches to religious education for a multi-faith school, although it could be said that this was a multi-faith school. Approximately 14% of families belonged to non-Christian religions or no religion (Appendix A). While another study may well examine religious education in such a context, it was the purpose of this study specifically to examine Catholic religious education as provided through the CDB in *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005).

This chapter has provided the context in which the research was conducted. The parents and teachers were in a community which was multicultural, yet predominantly Christian in composition, with the major religious affiliation in the school being Catholic. This regional community was under some financial stress due to economic and environmental factors. The school was the only one offering religious education

through all the secondary school year levels, with this curriculum based on the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) document of the CDB. This context is taken into account in the analysis of data.

The following chapter provides further information about the factors that have influenced religious education in the school and which may have had an impact on the parents and teachers who took part in the research. Issues identified from the literature reviewed in Chapter three have provided the basis for structuring the instruments used in the research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the research questions are given an interpretive framework through a literature analysis of writings about the nature and purposes of religious education and about relevant roles of parents and teachers. The documents that were analysed were drawn from four sources: a) the universal Catholic Church documents; b) Catholic dioceses responsible for overseeing the religious education of the school; c) school-based documents related to religious education; and d) the writings of theorists in religious education, and other relevant contributions.

The aim of the literature review was to survey a wide range of views on religious education that raise issues that could be addressed in the development of items for the questionnaire and interviews. This would ensure a suitably broad range of dimensions of religious education for examination in the collection of data from the parents and the religious education teachers, and it would provide a relevant background for interpreting the results of the questionnaire.

The literature review takes into account the considerable change and development in the theory and practice of classroom religious education in Catholic schools in Australia and other English speaking countries, that has occurred since the 1960s (Rossiter, 1981, 1999; Buchanan, 2003; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

In reviewing changes in Catholic religious education, this chapter gives special attention to Catholic Church documents, and to the key ecclesial constructs that have been

used for interpreting religious education – namely ‘catechesis’ and ‘evangelisation’. Other constructs such as ‘mission, ‘ministry’, ‘witness’ and ‘conversion’ are also considered. The other principal way of analysing changes in understandings of religious education is through a thorough examination of a historical approach typology– that is the sequence of different approaches to religious education that have developed in Catholic schools since the 1960s.

### Documents of the Roman Catholic Church that have a Bearing on Catholic School Religious Education

The Roman Catholic Church has always placed great importance on its mission of bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, and this is reflected in the documents that have a bearing on religious education. These include documents from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and Roman documents published subsequently.

Catholic Church documents relevant to religious education in Catholic schools can be classified in three basic levels; a) documents arising from the Second Vatican Council, Papal statements and Vatican documents from various Congregations; b) documents of the Australian Catholic Church including statements from the Australian Episcopal Conference, Diocesan Bishops and Catholic Education Offices (particularly in published Guidelines for Religious Education); and c) school-based documentation, which takes documents from the Second Vatican Council and the Australian Catholic Church into account in formulating classroom religious education practices and principles to suit the local educational setting. Table 3.1 lists the relevant source documents reflecting the above three categories and levels of authority.

*Table 3.1 List of primary source documents on Catholic religious education*

<p><b>Group 1A: Documents of Vatican II, and the Popes</b>  Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis, [GE], 1965)  Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, [GS] , 1965)  On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi, [EN], 1975)  Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae, [CT], 1979)  At the Beginning of the Third Millennium (Novo Millennio Ineunte, [NMI], 2000).  Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 1994)</p>
<p><b>Group 1B: Documents from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy</b>  General Catechetical Directory (GCD, 1971)  General Directory of Catechesis (GDC, 1997)</p> <p><b>Group 1C: Documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education</b>  The Catholic School (CS, 1977)  Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (LCS, 1982)  The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (RDECS, 1988)  The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (CSTTM, 1997)</p> <p><b>Group 2: Documents from the Australian Episcopal Conference and other national documents</b>  The Renewal of the Education of Faith (REF, 1970)</p>
<p><b>Group 3: Documents from the Diocese of Ballarat.</b>  Guidelines for Religious Education for Secondary Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (1973, 1984)  Guidelines for Religious Education for Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (1995)  Awakenings Core Document (2005)</p>

Authoritative Church Document Views of the Nature and Purposes of Religious Education and the Key Ecclesial Constructs ‘Catechesis’ and ‘Evangelisation’.

From the Catholic Church’s perspective, the documents listed above are the primary sources of understandings about the nature and purposes of religious education.

Documents from categories 1A and 1B were concerned with the wider Church ministry of education and evangelisation, of which the contribution of Catholic schools is only a part.

They do not specifically refer to school religious education. Documents from category

1C, from CCE, do refer directly to Catholic schools and religious education. Documents at levels 2 and 3 refer directly to Catholic school religious education.

While these documents are a source of normative understandings of Catholic school religious education, the extent to which they affect the thinking of teachers of religious education and parents from Catholic schools has not yet been investigated through research. The Church documents, particularly those at categories 1 and 2, give direction, if, at times, mixed messages, regarding the purpose of religious education, but leave open to local interpretation and application the processes to be employed in the actual teaching of religious education in the school.

The documents of the Church continually framed the discussion on religious education within the parameters of 'evangelisation' and 'catechesis'. This was in accord with the mission of the Church to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, to those who had not heard the message, to those who had heard it without accepting it, and to those who were in the process of developing a personal response to this Good News (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy [SCC], 1997). The publication of the *General Directory for Catechesis* ([GDC], SCC, 1997) underlined the importance of this Christian calling to proclaim the Good News. In response to this, questions arose as to the relationship between religious education, evangelisation and catechesis. These questions included how catechesis and evangelisation were to be understood in terms of their implications for Catholic school religious education; how religious education was to be conducted; who should participate in religious education and how their roles should be defined or differentiated; what the role of the Catholic school should be in catechesis and evangelisation; what should be expected of the Catholic religious education teacher; what should be expected of the parents of students in Catholic schools; how the effectiveness of religious education should be evaluated and assessed; what preparation should be expected

of teachers of religious education; how the Catholic school should see itself in relation to the universal, and local Church, and how clear the documents of the Catholic Church are in clarifying the nature and purpose of religious education.

Development of practical expectations for classroom religious education needs to take these questions into account. They are pertinent to the organisation of a cohesive religious education program in Catholic schools, as well as to the expectations of both teachers and parents – even though it could be expected that parents may have less familiarity with the ecclesial terms like ‘catechesis’ and ‘evangelisation’. Later, what is said in the documents about these terms is summarised, together with other key constructs such as witnessing, mission, ministry and inculturation. In addition, the task of taking an appropriate position with respect to these questions also needs to take into account the range of religious commitments and familiarity with religious culture on the part of teachers and parents.

#### Documents of the Australian Catholic Church

This section of the literature review analyses documents from the Australian Catholic Church that are relevant to school religious education. The NCEC paper by Holohan (1999), *Australian Religious Education – Facing the Challenges* [AREFC] commenced with the question, “What should Catholic schools be trying to achieve in religious education?” (p. 7). The question was raised as a way of discussing the distinction between catechesis and religious education. It also raised issues of content and process within religious education. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* ([CCC], John Paul II, 1996) was presented in AREFC (Holohan, 1999) as the resource of Revelation and Church teaching. The document, however, was not clear in its use of the terminology of religious education and catechesis. The researcher has noted that, in the discussion of Catholic

school religious education, there has been a problem with lack of clarity in the use of ecclesial and educational language, where evangelisation, catechesis, religious instruction and religious education have tended to be used interchangeably or with different meanings.

The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) Religious Education Guidelines made a priority of emphasising, and distinguishing between, the evangelising and catechising roles of the Catholic school. This was with direct reference to the documents of the Second Vatican Council, GDC (SCC, 1997) and other Church documents. It attempted to help schools and school communities, including parents, to better understand the place of the mission of the Church in religious education particularly, and in the Catholic school generally.

*Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) was a positive step in building on previous Church documents which called for a realisation of the diversity of students, families and social settings in clarifying hopes associated with personal faith development (p. 24-26). This document formed the basis for the planning of the religious education curriculum in the school at the centre of the research project. The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) document is analysed later in this chapter.

#### Analysis of Key Ecclesial Constructs for Describing the Role of School Religious Education: 'Evangelisation', 'Catechesis' and 'Religious Education'

In light of what has been noted above, this section provides a summary of the key characteristics of the following constructs that are central to the discussion of religious education in Church documents:

##### *Evangelisation*

Evangelisation refers to all those activities where Christians deliberately relate beyond the boundaries of the faith community, with the aim of communicating the insights, practices and priorities formed through their relationship with Jesus

Christ, and their understanding of his role in inaugurating the Reign of God (CDB, 2005, p. 34).

Evangelisation also includes inculturation, the practical hermeneutic between the gospel and culture in such a way that it influences those in their community.

Evangelisation calls the whole Church to share the Christian story with all who are able to hear it. As expressed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (Paul VI, [EN], 1975) in relation to evangelisation:

It is the duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced. It does not permit either indifference, syncretism or accommodation. It is a question of people's salvation. It is the beauty of the Revelation that it represents. It brings with it a wisdom that is not of this world. (5)

This challenge of evangelisation was framed within the responsibility to critique and challenge the culture of the time in order to transform it in the light of the Gospel:

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed. (20)

There was also an appeal to a 'new evangelisation' in which the Church, and subsequently the Catholic school, was called to be in outreach to those within the society/school:

This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted, in such a way that the particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness. (John Paul II, 2000, 40)

The call to a 'new evangelisation' was to proclaim the Gospel *anew* to those who had heard the message but who had let it lie dormant, as well as to those who had not heard the Word (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* [RM] , 1990). Catholic schools were, therefore, challenged to find appropriate ways of proclaiming the Gospel to the students, staff, parents and wider community who may have been baptised but who had not embraced the

message fully. The non-Christian members of the school community were to be given a chance to hear the Gospel in culturally relevant ways through word and witness (BTM, 2000).

### *Catechesis*

Catechesis refers to the ways in which a Christian community assists others to actively participate in the shared language, symbols, liturgy, moral codes and activities of the believing community. Catechesis aims to “make people’s faith, enlightened by teaching, a living faith, explicit and active.” (GE, 1965, 14). CT (John Paul II, 1979) and EN (Paul VI, 1976) located catechesis within the context of evangelization. The role of the Catholic school is to take this challenge of providing catechesis and to build programs in light of the culture of the students, with methods appropriate to best teaching practices and which remain true to Christian principles and values (SCC, 1997). The catechetical challenge is to take those who have heard the Gospel to ever-deeper levels of faith. The General Catechetical Directory [GCD] (SCC, 1971) proposed that The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA] was the principal model for catechesis and that catechesis was primarily for adults. While important for Church ministry as a whole, especially in parishes, this adult focus poses some difficulty for interpreting the place of catechesis for children and adolescents in the school context.

### *Religious Education*

The classroom component of religious education refers to the formal curriculum that has set educational objectives, methodologies and assessment processes. It is conducted by a teacher following a set curriculum developed from the mandated guidelines of the local bishop. The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) document states that:

At its best, religious education sets out to inform, form and transform learners and teachers by engaging them with the intellectual, ethical and spiritual richness of the Catholic tradition. Religious education invites and enables a life-long journey of awakening to the deep meaning of human life and community, of the world we inhabit and sustain, and of our cultural and religious heritage, against the horizon of the Reign of God enfleshed in the mission and person of Jesus Christ, and communicated in the Church. (CDB, 2005, p. 57)

An Overview of the Use of Terminology in Various Church Documents  
Relevant to this Study

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the frequency of use of specific terminology in various Church documents used in this study.

*Table 3.2 Terminology from Catholic Church documents relevant to religious education*

Church document	Term used and number of times used					
	Parent	teacher	catechesis	evangelisation	school	religious education
GE (1965)	7	13	0	0	46	2
EN (1965)	4	7	7	0	1	0
GCD (1971)	12	5	253	0	18	3
CS (1977)	11	23	1	3	215	2
CT (1979)	13	31	245	0	23	4
LCS (1982)	9	63	3	0	177	5
RDE (1988)	14	89	10	0	225	2
GDC (1997)	18	28	861	0	95	3
CSTTM (1998)	5	11	0	0	105	0

This table shows that parents are not referred to frequently in the Church documents. There was a greater focus on teachers in all except one document, GCD (SCC, 1971). This could be expected as the documents generally were concerned with Church ministry and directed to educators and clergy, while documents from the

Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE] were more specifically concerned with Catholic schools. Parents were mentioned in the Church documents more as ‘initial educators in the faith’ than as contributors of the school religious education. Table 3.2 also shows that there were relatively few references to the relationship between the parents and the religious education offered by the school. ‘Religious education’ as a term was not mentioned in the document *Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1997). This reinforced the general view that the documents lacked detail on religious education in schools.

‘Catechesis’ as a term was occurred most frequently in CT (John Paul II, 1979), GCD (SCC, 1971) and in GDC (SCC, 1997). Where there was little use of the term ‘catechesis’ there was no corresponding increase in the frequency of use of ‘religious education’ as a substitute. While the *Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic Schools* (CCE, [RDECS], 1988), made a distinction between ‘catechesis’ and ‘religious instruction’, this distinction was not so prominent in the GDC (SCC, 1997). GDC (SCC, 1997), with an emphasis on different ‘types’ of catechesis, may not have supported the distinction that had been made in earlier documents.

The term “school” was used commonly, especially in the later documents. This is possibly an indication of the importance of the Catholic school in the ever-increasing secular world where parents and students, who are not active in parish life, find the school to be their principal point of contact with the Church.

#### Religious Education as a Subject in the Secondary School Curriculum

Religious education has become a distinct subject within the Catholic secondary school. This is in accord with *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005), which in turn is based on universal Church documents. While the Church documents provide a solid foundation for religious

education, the process has become problematic because of the contradictory or unclear use of terminology as noted above.

GE (1965) noted the importance of education in the development of faith. This declaration made specific reference to school education: “the school is of outstanding importance” (GE, 5). The declaration also highlighted the role of teachers in this process: “But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs” (GE, 8). Although this declaration lacked practical detail about school education and teachers, it did lead to post-conciliar documents that attempted to raise the profile of what has now become the independent curriculum area of religious education.

EN (Paul VI, 1976) took up the Second Vatican Council’s desire for the Church to engage with the world. This included the advice to make religious instruction relevant to those to whom it was addressed. Of interest to this research is that the changing needs of young people were mentioned as requiring particular attention. A systematic religious instruction was required in which the “methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned” (EN, Paul VI, 1975, 44). This laid the foundations for acceptance of current educational methodologies in religious education, but it was not a specific reference to religious education as such. This was more generally addressed to the Church and home as agents of evangelisation and catechesis.

CT (John Paul II, 1979) reflected on 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” (CT, 69). This document stressed that religious education should be an educationally sound experience for students with a clear foundation in the teachings of the Catholic tradition. It did not prescribe religious education as a separate curriculum subject, but it laid the

foundation for the developments which followed. There was a linking, but not equating, of religious education and catechesis (Fleming, 2002).

GCD (SCC, 1971) again built on the foundations of educational excellence, but remained set in the catechetical model which is discussed later in this chapter. GCD (SCC, 1971) recognized the need for incorporating advances in sciences, theology, and current social insights. CS (CCE, 1977) recognised the distinctive religious education class in its reference, “teaching (of religion) is not merely confined to ‘religious classes’ within the school curriculum” (CS, 50). This indicated an expansion of the influence of the religious education process, but did not refer to the establishment of the separate class for teaching about religion. There was no mention in CS (CCE, 1977) of a religious education curriculum. The religious education curriculum was understood to be situated within the broader catechesis of the Church (Malone 1992, p.8). *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (CCE, 1982) was the first Church document to clearly spell out the distinction between 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 (CCE, 1979, 56).

This was an explicit recognition of the individual nature of what is now known as religious education. This was reinforced in RDECS (CCE, 1988):

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. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime (CCE, 1988, 68).

This was further elaborated in the same document where knowledge was regarded as the focus of the school's educational processes, while maturity in faith was seen as the focus of catechesis:

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 however, 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. (CCS,1988, 69)

This document indicated recognition by the Church of the need to distinguish between the aims and processes of religious education and catechesis. The separation of religious education from catechesis did not remove the hope that the classroom study of the religion would support, and stimulate, the faith development of students.

### Religious Education and Spirituality

CT (1979) clarified the role of the school as a "support" to the catechetical processes of the parish and family (Rummery, 1980, p. 27). It recognised the value of religious education as an agent for personal faith and spiritual development, without focusing on the development of faith and spirituality as the sole aim of religious education.

There have been widespread developments in the way that the term 'spirituality' has been interpreted and applied in society generally and in religious education in particular over the past decade (Hay and Nye, 1998; Hyde, 2006; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). Within the Catholic Church, there was a traditional understanding that spirituality was directly linked to theology and a religious perspective on life and life after death. Catholic spirituality was often associated with liturgy, prayer, self-sacrifice and adherence to Church teachings and practices within the framework of the Catholic Church institution

(Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). Within this, there were variations from deeply mystical spirituality such as that associated with John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Avila, as well as a range of other interpretations of the Catholic spiritual life including those such as Catherine McAuley, who saw that a life devoted to social justice and compassion for others was an essential element of their Christian spirituality (Sullivan, 1995).

There has also been a distinction between institutional religion and personal spirituality (Ericker, 2001; Priestly, 2002; Tacey, 2003; Crawford & Rossiter, 1993) where one form of spirituality is institutionally based and the other is more personal, more private and individualistic, with scope for the individual to take elements of institutional religions or secular movements or ideas and blend these with personal experience to form an individualistic spiritual orientation and practice. The role of institutional religions in being able to take an individual's spiritual experiences and give them a communal meaning was examined by Tacey (2003). Supporting the role of religions, Dean (2004) claimed that for spirituality to have meaning it required a religious or theological framework for support.

A broad examination of the various approaches and types of spirituality that have been presented by the historical Christian tradition, and those that were advocated in contemporary society, was provided by Hyde (2006). Reflecting a growing interest in spirituality, Zohar and Marshall (2000) claimed that between 30-40% of British respondents reported a spiritual experience that had a significant impact on their beliefs and/or practices in life. The argument developed in support of a "God Spot" in the cerebral cortex that was seen to be common to all humans. From this perspective, religious education could therefore be seen to have an important role in supporting the development of the spirituality of all of the students. It was noted by Crawford & Rossiter

(1993) that young people were asking questions about spiritual issues that previous generations would have asked at an older age.

Exploring the place of spirituality for youth, Engebretson (2007) found that spirituality was an important aspect of the lives of teenage males, but that many of the boys who contributed to her research had some difficulty articulating the nature of the spiritual dimension of their lives. The boys had a lack of appropriate language and the confidence to dialogue about 'religious' matters, but they were able to discuss aspects of spirituality such as hope, friendships and reflective experiences.

Spirituality among young people aged 15 to 25 years in the United Kingdom was explored and discussed with reference to 'formative' and 'transformative' experiences (Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo and Cray, 2006 p. 12-13). Formative referred to human potential for, and a general sense of, relationship with a higher reality, with other people and with creation. Transformative spirituality was linked to more specific efforts to develop awareness of, and relationship with, a deeper, transcendent reality (Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo and Cray, 2006). Further work with youth spirituality was conducted by Smith and Denton (2005) and Mason, Singleton & Webber (2007). The Catholic school was seen as potentially assisting students to access the means for developing both the formative and transformative dimensions of their spirituality. It was argued that the school needed to provide access to the "externals and religious practices of the Church" (Rossiter, 1997, p. 20), along with personal experiences of Catholic liturgy and prayer as part of resourcing the student's spiritual development.

It was also argued that religious education should provide access to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Church, to assist with spiritual development for students at all levels, as appropriate (Rossiter, 1997; Crawford and Rossiter, 1993). There were suggestions that for older students it was also important to provide opportunities for the

study of how religious identity developed within the influences of family, personal experience and cultural elements (Rossiter, 1997). It was noted that these factors had an impact on the way that young people developed spiritually, morally and with self-understanding. Spiritual development of students was seen as an opportunity to address the elements of meaning, connectedness and awareness of themselves as people of empathy and compassion (de Souza, 2006).

The influences noted by Rossiter (1997) were examined by de Souza (2006) who claimed that religious education should engage contemporary technological change and should raise awareness of the way that influences in society could affect an individual's identity and worldview. The development of spirituality in young people was seen to be intricately bound up with the need to raise awareness of the factors that reflect the beliefs and practices of the multi-faith and secular influences operating in the contemporary world of students (de Souza, 2006). This included examining how architecture, ritual and dress, among other aspects, reflected the values and beliefs of religions and ideas about life. Thus, the spirituality of young people needed to be grounded in the realities of their daily experiences in a process of connecting the rational, emotional and spiritual dimensions of students. The spiritual response that Groome (1998) termed a 'spiritual awakening' was linked to a spirituality that assisted in the development of intuitive responses in young people (de Souza, 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006).

#### Religious Education as an Opportunity for Moral Development in Students

A number of ways in which young people develop moral and spiritual values were listed by Crawford and Rossiter (1993). They noted that young people were willing to draw from various sources such as family, peers, the media, their own and other religious traditions and their own experiences. This eclectic nature of forming morality and

spirituality was consistent with the nature of society today, where the multi-cultural and pluralistic nature of the media allowed young people access to multiple influences which were not available to their parents or grandparents.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) acknowledged this societal change, and subsequent Catholic Church documents have reinforced the need for the school to take this into account when planning and teaching religious education to young people (Abbott, [GE], 1965; John Paul II, 1979; SCC, 1971; SCC, 1997; CCE, 1977; CCE, 1997; Holohan, 1999). The Ballarat Catholic Diocese's religious education guidelines, *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) noted that "the curriculum explicitly relates education to the formation of moral character and the promotion of personal and social justice for the sake of the common good" (CDB, 2005, p. 23) with a key focus on the outcome of assisting students to make a "considered response to Christian values and attitudes" (CDB, 2005, p.44). This was aligned with CS (CCE, 1977): "The school must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience." (CCE, 1977, 31).

*Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) developed this overarching expectation of opportunity for moral development into one of its major teaching strands. 'Christian Life'. It developed units of work for each of the levels of primary and secondary school, with specific outcomes that addressed contemporary understanding of the stages of spiritual and moral development, which have been identified by theorists such as Piaget (1965, 1976), Maslow (1970), Fowler (1981, 1992), Erikson (1968, 1975), and Kohlberg (1976, 1981, 1984). Crotty (2007) agreed that the development of moral reasoning must be a part of religious education and it must connect approaches to moral reasoning to the multi-cultural reality of school and society today. The Catholic schools of the Ballarat diocese are expected to address the development of morality and social justice within their religious

education curricula, within the broader context of the school and within their relationship with the broader society, as an integral aspect of the Catholic Church's outreach to families and young people.

## Parents and Religious Education

### *Parents, the First Educators of Children in Faith.*

The documents of the Roman Catholic Church are explicit in asserting that the role of parents in faith development is primary and paramount. CT (John Paul II, 1979, 118) highlighted the continued desire of the Church for parents to take responsibility in regard to education in the faith. GE (Abbott, 1965) goes further to say: "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognised as the primary and principal educators" (GE, 3). This message is reinforced in EN (Paul VI, 1976, 71) where the evangelising nature of family is stressed. This same theme is taken up in GCD (SCC, 1972) which declares that this role of parents needs support and nurturing [SCC, 1972]. This, in turn, requires that the educational arm of the Church reaches out to parents, so that this initial evangelising and catechising role can be suitably formed and developed. GDC (SCC, 1997, 226-7) again highlighting the importance of the family unit, blessed by the sacrament of matrimony, as where family life becomes a faith journey. It urges educators and catechists to support parents in educating their children in faith.

Parents are to seek religious schooling, if possible, for their children (John Paul II, 1979), but at the same time schools are challenged to provide quality religious instruction that could attract parents. Within the school, parents are seen by the Church as having a central place since "they are the natural and irreplaceable agents in the education of their

children” (CCE, 1988, 32). These and other documentary references place parents at the centre of the faith development of their children. The documents closely link the role of the school with that of the parents in provision of opportunities for faith development. CSTTM (CCE, 1998) adds the perspective that in many cases, parents are withdrawing from the educational role due to increased willingness to delegate this responsibility to the school. However, there is no detailed account of what this role entails.

Overall, the documents of the Church encourage parents as first educators of their children in faith, encourage them to seek Catholic schooling to support this faith development, and call on schools to foster an atmosphere and practical structure to build networks with parents as educators in faith. However, they do not address the actual nature of the interaction between school and parents. Participation in school boards, parents and friends groups and other ancillary groups is important, but is distinct from involvement in the actual classroom religious education program of the school. This is left predominantly to the religious education teachers, under the guidance of the relevant authorities within and beyond the school.

Parents are to support and to be supported, but they were not the professional educators and as such are called to a different, yet essential, role as family faith-supporters, nurturers and witnesses to the faith in their unique situations. The school is charged with the provision of relevant and authentic religious education for students, which supplements and complements the work of parents and families. Quillinan (2004) highlighted the need for the parents, school and Church to work together in order to fulfil the Church’s goal of assisting the young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood with a personal faith and willingness to take on a life-long process of faith formation and a commitment to living that faith.

One issue raised by Rymarz (2007) was the ability of parents to pass on a clear understanding of their own faith to their children. Rymarz (2007) found that many of the parents who saw themselves as active Catholics acknowledged having difficulties in articulating their faith to their children. They generally lacked both the confidence and the language to talk about their personal and private beliefs and practices. It was noted that there had been an emphasis on the important role of the family for inter-generational transmission of faith and religious practices as young people moved towards adult faith (Rymarz, 2007). Even if parents had difficulty communicating verbally about their faith, it was found that there was a close link between the parents' religious beliefs and religious practices, and those of their children (Rymarz & Graham, 2005, 2006).

The parents were shown to be a strong influence on their children in terms of religious and spiritual development. Rymarz (2007) found that there were increasing numbers and types of challenges to parents mentoring in religious matters. He found that younger parents were more likely to "craft their own understanding of what being a Catholic meant" (p. 41). Older parents were more likely to be influenced by the Second Vatican Council which confronted Catholic culture and challenged it to redefine its identity (Rymarz, 2007). Similarly, McLaughlin (2005) noted that the example and attitudes of parents were the most important elements in the faith education of their children. Parental influence was found to be the most important acknowledged influence in the faith development of young people, before the influence of Church teachings, while religious education was found to be a less important influence (Maroney, 2007).

## Teachers and Religious Education

### *Teachers and Witnessing to the Faith of the Catholic Church*

The role of the religious education teacher has been a topic of much discussion within Catholic education (Rossiter, 2008; CCE, 1998; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; CCE, 1977;

Engebretson and Rymarz, 2004). This has often led to expectations that the teacher be catechist and evangelizer while at the same time engaging in the educational processes of teaching. The documents of the Church support all three functions, but there have been questions as to how well they can all be achieved within the one role of the religious education teacher. The documents expressed the hope that schools would foster an atmosphere that was permeated by the gospel spirit and Christian charity in which students could come to see the love of God living in the community of the school and in all its processes and structures (Abbott, *Gaudium et Spes*, [GS], 1965, 8; SCC, 1972, 35; SCC, 1997, 46, 259; CCE, 1977, 53; CCE, 1982, 41). This acknowledged the role of all in Catholic schools in establishing a living witness to the Christian message. CS (CCE, 1977, 43) considered that the successful achievement of the aim of the Catholic school: “depends not so much on subject matter or methodology as on the people who work there.” While this acknowledged the importance of personal witness, as noted above, it can create difficulties when this view of witnessing obscures the ‘teaching/learning’ activities of religious education.

There have also been issues associated with how the teacher has seen his/her role within these three dimensions. The teacher’s role has been, at times, linked with that of witness to the Catholic faith. The lived witness of the catechist was seen as a necessity (SCC, 1997, 35). The Sacred Congregation for the Clergy added that “Catechists must be able to be, at one and the same time, teachers, educators and witnesses of the faith” (SCC 1972, 237). This acknowledged the potential of the catechist/teacher to influence the faith development of the student through a lived example of and witness to Christian virtues and values.

However, witnessing while teaching in the classroom is open to different interpretations – especially in view of the range of religious backgrounds in the students

and the teachers. Much depends on how 'witnessing' is to be interpreted. For example, some may see this in terms of testifying openly to one's own personal beliefs and exhorting pupils to witness to their faith. Others might see the classroom as a public educational forum, as part of compulsory schooling, and not as a voluntary commitment group. For this latter perspective, religious education is primarily concerned with studying religion and not with personal testimony – even though the sharing of personal faith insights (by teachers and pupils) is valued as a normal part of the process where this occurs in an environment of freedom (Rossiter, 2008). By going about their work in a professional fashion within the classroom, teachers have the opportunity to be positive role models for their pupils. In religious education, in view of the often personal nature of the subject matter, there may be additional spiritual and religious possibilities for this witnessing or role modeling.

The way in which teachers witness to the faith of the Church would be affected by the relationship that the teacher has with the Church, and the degree to which the teacher has made a personal commitment to the teachings and traditions of the Church. Many Catholic teachers, and in particular the younger ones, are ready to call Church authority and practice into question, even informally (McLaughlin, 2002). This is likely to be a reflection of the views of the majority of Catholics, who tend to ignore or disregard Church teachings that seem to them 'out of date' or not 'realistic' (Dixon, et al, 2007). Witnessing, for this group would have a particular character influenced by their relationship with Church authority.

The Catholic Church documents exhorted Catholic teachers to witness to faith by demonstrating the Gospel message, in a way in which young people would see a union of the doctrine and the practical reality of the Christian faith. This 'witnessing' was interpreted as part of the evangelising thrust of Catholic schools – proclaiming the gospel

in such a way that “evokes admiration and conversion” (Paul VI, 1976, 15). This was reiterated by Pope Paul VI when he stated that “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (Paul VI, 1976, 41).

This statement in EN (Paul VI, 1976) may lead to confusion among teachers as they try to balance, and possibly equate, witnessing with teaching. Witnessing refers to a lived personal response to the Gospel, whereas teaching is more concerned with pedagogy, content and educational outcomes. There is an opportunity for co-existence but there needs to be an understanding that they were not the same thing (Rossiter, 2008).

CCE (1982) urges teachers to present to students “Christian attitudes and behaviour that are so conspicuously absent from the secular atmosphere in which they live.” (CCE, 1982, 32). This is particularly relevant to religious education teachers who are called to be witnesses that “bring the content of the lessons to life” (CCE, 1988, 96). The theory in the Church documents presumes a readiness on the part of Church ministers (and by assumption teachers of religious education in Catholic schools) to be witnesses. There is also a presumed familiarity with theology and Catholic religious culture. However, many of the lay teachers in Catholic schools, while they could well be good moral role models, may not have the desired overt commitment to being religious witnesses, nor a high level of familiarity with theology and Catholic religious culture. This situation poses problems as to how witnessing to Catholic faith is to be interpreted – especially in the religion classroom. It raises questions as to whether there is a gap between theory and practice. In the past, it was presumed that religious personnel, because of their professed religious lifestyle, automatically served as witnesses to faith. Today there is a need to clarify what this means for lay teachers. A proportion of the lay teachers involved in religious

education could well be a part of a generation who have had limited engagement with the Church, a description that has been applied to many of the students.

For many lay teachers of religious education, the expectation of providing a living witness to the faith of the Church may challenge their limited exposure and commitment to the Catholic tradition. The documents refer to the difficulties facing students in regard to familiarity with the faith tradition, but neglect to address that this problem also applies to teachers. Teachers of religious education may not be clear about what demands the Church places on them regarding 'ministry' in religious education. There is also the issue of what is entailed in witnessing. It has two main components, first being a moral witness as evident in the values implicit in behaviour, and second, showing familiarity with the Catholic religious heritage, spirituality and religious practice.

Another aspect of the complexity of this question is the question of how classroom religious education contributes to pupils' faith development. For example, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) considered that it was problematic to associate the development of pupils' personal faith too exclusively with so called 'faith sharing' in the classroom. They saw the knowledge and understanding of faith as the principal task in this context, which in due time might contribute to actual growth in pupils' faith. This showed that the purpose of religious education to promote pupils' faith development was understood in different ways, and with different estimates of the psychological and religious dynamics that were occurring in the classroom. Rossiter (1997, 2005) considered that other contexts such as retreats, liturgies and reflective exercises allowed for more reflection, personal discussion and expression of emotion. The role of the teacher in these situations could create greater opportunity for 'witnessing' to have an impact on the students. The value of retreats as special opportunities for the more personal and emotional aspects of religious education was supported by Tullio (2006). Rossiter (2005) cautioned those who regarded these

retreat activities as being more ‘appropriate’ and ‘effective’ for promoting faith development than the classroom, because such judgments presumed too simplistic a relationship between ‘feel-good’ activities and ‘faith development’ and tended to undervalue the contribution of normal classroom study of religion. An aim of the present study was to discover how religious education teachers understood their roles as witnesses, and to find out what expectations parents have of teachers in this regard.

A further aspect of the challenge of creating a living faith environment, especially in the religious education classroom, is the degree to which teachers and parents share common expectations of the role of religious education and the teacher. Addressing this, RDECS (CCE, 1988, 42) called for a close working relationship between the school and parents in matters of religion. The research reported in this thesis aimed to determine how teachers and parents viewed the challenges of religious education today, in light of these documentary expectations and exhortations. It also explores how parents and teachers see their partnership in the religious education of the students.

### *The Role of Teachers in a Counter-Cultural Situation*

There has been a greater awareness, in recent years, of the need for teachers to create learning environments and processes that engage students, and which address the issues raised by a widespread ‘globalised’ secularism, materialism and individualism characteristic of many modern societies (CCE, 1997). Australian students and teachers are affected by elements of this culture which challenge traditional religion. The critiques of materialistic, individualistic cultures in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) provide a ‘counter-cultural’ thrust for those involved in Church ministry and religious education. While critiquing culture has been prominent in the documents, the level of its active translation into classroom practice may have varied from teacher to

teacher. The role of the teacher in helping students to critique their society is an important element of their role within religious education, and students have the opportunity to consider the values and beliefs that underpin structures and practices (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). This is particularly relevant to the study of social justice issues, and for making moral judgments. The means by which this cultural critique can be implemented is examined in the later section of this literature review which deals with the educational or pedagogical approach to religious education.

The Second Vatican Council documents place a high priority on the establishment of the school community as a genuine, integrated centre where families, teachers and others associated with the school provide support and share the same core values of the Christian tradition (Abbott, GE, 1965, 5). The Church documents also indicated what was to be taught in Catholic schools and this was spelled out in the CCC (John Paul II, 1994). Not so clearly defined were the processes to be employed to communicate this content in a manner that allows young people in Catholic schools to appreciate and personalise the Good News of Jesus Christ inherent in the content. How to present Christian teaching in an inviting way to secondary school students, who appear somewhat uninterested, is challenging for teachers of religious education. The problem is how to make the gospel message accessible to young people within a media and technology-dominated culture that presents many challenges to the Christian message.

#### *Preparation of Teachers for the Task of Religious Education*

Catholic Church documents state that teachers in Catholic schools should be competent and highly motivated, and skilled in the art of teaching. This includes up-to-date knowledge of psychology, technology, the arts and the current educational pedagogies (Abbott, GE, 1965, 1; CCE, 1977, 67). Until recently, the major qualification for teaching

religious education was a willingness to do so. This was often an important pre-requisite for employment in Catholic schools, because of the need to have enough teachers to take religious education classes. This still remains an issue for some schools, but there are now a growing number of teachers who have specific religious education qualifications, such as post-graduate courses in religious education and theology, undergraduate degree courses in the same areas and, for most teachers of religious education in schools, regular school-based professional development programs in a range of theology and Church related topics. These programs have promoted an accumulation of knowledge and skills which have been recognised by the Catholic Education Offices as suitable preparation for teaching religious education. Teachers need to embrace contemporary technologies and educational strategies in order to engage with young people who are immersed in this new culture (Rossiter, 1997).

Alongside this formal preparation has been the valuable practice of teaching religious education and working with colleagues and Religious Education Co-ordinators. This process has assisted in keeping staff aware of current developments in religious education. Preparation of staff is regarded as a necessity (CCE, 1982, 27) which calls for “solid professional formation” of lay Catholics in school. Yet, despite the programs in place that foster the professional development of teachers of religious education, there remains a general lack of formal qualifications in the area, and many are specialists in other curriculum areas, who are asked to teach one religious education class. This does not diminish their willingness to be professional in their teaching of religion but, it makes it difficult for such teachers to become well grounded in the theory and relevant content of religious education. Engebretson and Rymarz (2004) found that most religious education teachers in Catholic secondary schools lacked strong academic qualifications to teach

religious education. Rymarz (2004, 2006) noted that this made it difficult for these teachers to tackle the task of teaching about complex theological issues.

### Research Issues Arising from this Review of the Documents Pertinent to Religious Education in a Catholic Secondary School

The nature of the relationship between school and parents in regard to religious education is a key issue. There is uncertainty about the extent to which parents might become involved in the structuring of the religious education curriculum, and in having oversight of what is taught in class. It is difficult to harmonise in practical terms the parents' principal responsibility for their children's education in faith, with the professional responsibility of the teacher for classroom religious education. The Church documents do not provide details on this issue, although they do emphasise the need for the development of a supporting relationship between the professional educator and the parents, as they work together to encourage faith and educational development in students.

### The History of Catholic School Religious Education in Australia

The second section of this literature review provides a summary of developments in Australian Catholic school religious education since the 1950s that will serve as interpretive background in the light of which the empirical data in this project will be analysed. It illustrates the different understandings of the nature and purposes of religious education over this period, elements of which may still be evident in the views of the teachers and parents in this study. The summary refers to research and literature that have affected changes in approach and it draws on a number of 'historical approach typologies' – that is, accounts of different approaches or emphases in Catholic religious education since the 1950s (Buchanan, 2003; Crawford and Rossiter, 1985, 1988, 2006; Flynn, 1979;

Hill, 2004; Lovat, 2002; Rossiter, 1981, 1999; Rummery, 1975; Ryan, 1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2006).

The term 'approach' is used to describe a particular way of teaching religious education which contains distinctive presumptions of educational and theological principle (Engebretson, 1995). This way of speaking of religious education theory and practice has been widely used to identify ways that religious education has been taught in Australia over the years (Engebretson, 1995). The expectations of religious education on the part of teachers and parents are located within the range of ideas covered in this review of historical approaches. It is likely, however, that the views of parents and teachers may be influenced by ideas and emphases from across the different approaches, and not from just one approach. Similarly, the classroom practice of teachers might also be expected to involve a mixture of influences rather than the following of just one approach.

Historically, the different approaches were not always clearly defined or exclusive. In addition, as far as religion teaching was concerned, there was probably considerable overlap between approaches. The contemporary educational approach is in one sense not a new approach but a blending of ideas and influences from earlier approaches, but framed more within an academic structure. Various approaches would also have affected the views of those who authored current diocesan guidelines for religious education, but it is not within the scope of the study to investigate this question.

### *The Dogmatic or Catechism Approach to Religious Education*

#### *Introduction*

The dogmatic approach, prominent up to the early 1960s, was driven by a need to ensure that Catholics gained the necessary knowledge of their faith through learning doctrine.

This approach depended on the acceptance of the authority of the Church to transmit the traditional truths of the Catholic heritage. It made use of catechisms, fundamentally summaries of Catholic doctrine, which were to be learned by rote. The catechism was a practical teaching strategy for teachers with limited preparation.

### *Catechisms*

The dogmatic approach to religious education in Australia's Catholic schools continued the catechism tradition which was founded on the *Roman Catechism* (1566) emanating from the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The Council of Trent formulated the catechism as a means of clarifying what was to be believed by Catholics who were faced with a range of challenges from Protestant movements. These included Martin Luther's Protestant catechism dating from the Reformation. The Roman Catechism provided clarity for Catholics who needed guidance and reassurance in matters of doctrine. Australian Catholics faced challenges from a predominantly Protestant society which had many anti-Irish/Catholic sentiments simmering below the surface. The Catholic bishops adapted the Roman Catechism for students in Catholic schools into what was commonly called the penny catechism. "The catechism was a complete map of religious life, and knowing it by heart was the means both to avoid danger and to find certainty and security" (O'Farrell, 1992, p. 242). The catechism used in the Australian schools divided the content into sections such as the creed, commandments, sacraments and prayer (Ryan, 1997; (Rummery, 1975; Fleming, 2002).

### *Methodology of the Dogmatic Approach*

This approach continued to be the major source of religious education from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. This catechism-based dogmatic approach followed the

format of rote learning doctrine in an easily accessed format. The methodology controlled what was taught and how Church traditions were established and maintained. It provided Catholics with a sense of the certainty of their faith and it was a practical methodology for teachers of large classes with limited resources. There was a simple process of providing doctrine and having that information memorised in a question and answer format (Fleming, 2002). It enabled the teaching of Catholic doctrine with minimal training and it enabled teachers to have the support of parents who had been through a very similar process of religious education themselves (Ryan, 1997; Rummery, 1975). The approach stressed obedience to the authority of the Church and had a strong emphasis on a sense of duty to the Catholic Church. It allowed teachers to work with students who would be, or who were already, baptised Catholics. This approach was what Rummery (1975) referred to as the ‘magisterial’ approach: teacher as master and student as pupil or disciple.

#### *Comments about the Dogmatic Approach for this Study*

The dogmatic approach was influential for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the sole religious education method employed in Australian Catholic schools. It was effective in passing on knowledge of the foundational doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church through an uncomplicated and explicit process. This ease of use of a text was similar to the pedagogy in other subject areas where the text prescribed the learning process (Ryan, 1997; Lovat, 1989). The inherent demands for acceptance of dogma enabled the family to support the learning of the child, as this process was familiar to all, with the content remaining unchanged. This “social solidarity” (Ryan, 1997, p. 31) was considered to be important in the coherence of the Australian Catholic community. Many Catholics found a comfort in this definitive clarity of the catechism during challenging times in life. As the Catholic

school system grew with its large classes, the catechism was an efficient and effective tool for the teacher, whose training and knowledge in religious education was limited.

Despite these positive outcomes, the approach was questioned for a number of years before it was superseded. It was considered to lack any systematic means of developing students in theological or scriptural skills beyond learning the material of the catechism literally without any interpretation. This process tended to stifle critical questioning by young Catholics at a time when there were theological and scriptural developments that affected the ways Catholics understood their faith in the second half of the twentieth century (Ryan, 1997; Lovat, 1989). It was an approach that lacked attention to individual needs by treating all as being at the same stage of moral and religious development. There was little opportunity for drawing out students' personal response in faith as there was usually no class discussion. It was assumed that the students would respond in an appropriately Catholic manner. This was a linear process with limiting expectations, which were often laden with theological language beyond the level of understanding of students. It tended to impose an adult faith response on children who were not encouraged to develop their own personal responsibility or independence, but to accept the given faith formulae without question. This assent to the authority of the Church challenged any doubts that children may have had, removing opportunities for discussion or rational engagement in religious content and practices (Ryan, 1997).

### *The Kerygmatic or Salvation History Biblical Approach*

#### *Developments in Scripture Scholarship*

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic scripture scholarship began to catch up with the Protestant scholars. The first major development was Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ([DAS], Pius XII, 1943). This was a landmark for Catholic scripture

scholarship which turned attention to more symbolic, theological and literary interpretation of scripture and away from relatively literal readings. It encouraged more personal reading and interpretation of the Scriptures that in turn led to re-examination of traditional teachings. However, these developments in scripture scholarship, although not directly related to developments in religious education, did not filter down to lay Catholics in Australia at this time. The second major development came with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the opening of doors to an increased awareness of Revelation in the lives of individual persons and in the scripture and tradition of the Church. The *Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels* ([IHTG], Pontifical Biblical Commission, [PBC], 1964) was published during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and it continued the movement towards a non-literal approach to biblical understanding, yet one which strongly reaffirmed the truth of the message of salvation present in the scriptures (Ryan, 2007).

This direction in scholarship brought about developments in liturgical practices that in turn opened up scripture as a means of revelation to more people. Catholics were encouraged to engage with scripture and liturgy and to seek new insights into how these were relevant to contemporary life (Ryan, 2007). This provided challenges for traditional Catholic authority figures and doctrine, which had previously been the source of truth and faith for Catholics. Now Catholics could explore their faith in new ways, by reflecting on and studying the scriptures and participating in more contemporary liturgical experiences that brought the joyful message of salvation to individuals and classrooms (Buchanan, 2003). This was to be done within the guidance of biblical scholarship. Historically, these developments affected Catholic scholars and those studying theology at the time.

### *Influential Figures in the Kerygmatic Renewal – Jungmann and Hofinger*

Publications by Josef Jungmann (1957) and Johannes Hofinger (1966) had an impact on the development of the kerygmatic approach to religious education in Australia (Fleming, 2002; Ryan, 2007). European scholars highlighted the need to move towards a more scriptural and liturgical approach, which was more closely aligned with that of the early Christian Church. Jungmann (1957), whose work was originally written in the 1930s, saw the dogmatic approach as stale and lifeless compared to that of the early Church. He wanted to see a return to the historical and biblical sources, where he perceived more joy and enthusiasm for the Good News of salvation (Ryan, 1997, Fleming, 2002). Hofinger (1966) took the ideas of Jungmann and built on them. He saw the dogmatic approach as good when the student was in a supportive Christian environment, but there were increasing numbers of students who were not in this situation and the approach did little for them. Hofinger considered that memorisation was appropriate after learning had taken place, and not as an initial stage as was the case in the dogmatic approach. This respected the learning readiness of the children and was a better pedagogy in comparison with educational developments at the time. Hofinger also sought to bring 'joy' back into the religious education process, to reinvigorate young people's faith by proclaiming the good news of the person of Jesus in place of emphasising doctrinal content (Fleming, 2002).

### *Kerygmatic Renewal and the Kerygmatic Approach in Religious Education*

Before and during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) scholars such as Jungmann (1957) and Hofinger (1966) called into question the dogmatic approach to religious education. Learning catechism by rote also came into conflict with new educational thinking and ideas about learning coming from Dewey (1897, 1916), Montessori (1988,

reissue), Bruner (1966) and others who considered that learning was better promoted by engaging students in activity based programs (Ryan, 1997). New educational thinking required a more imaginative approach to teaching in a child-centred way with more scope to accommodate the diverse needs of individual students. In addition to the pedagogical concerns, questions were raised about the content of the dogmatic approach: Was it adequately presenting the early Christian joy and faith in the salvation message? Some educators considered that the doctrinal approach may have contributed to loss of faith on the part of some young people.

The first signs of the kerygmatic approach became evident in Australian Catholic religious education at the beginning of the 1960s. It was based on the intention of a joyful proclamation of the salvation story or Good News – heralding the message of God’s love and salvation (Ryan, 1997). One of its main goals was motivating the students to respond positively to the Good News of Jesus Christ as saviour of the world. It changed the emphasis from the transmission of doctrine to a proclamation of the Scriptures and the story of Jesus and the Church (Rummery, 1975, p. 11). This was a liberating experience for teachers who had previously been restricted to teaching Catechism answers (Rummery, 1975, p.12). Previously, in the catechism approach, students tended to be treated as passive receivers. By intention, the kerygmatic approach set out to enable the joy of the message of Christ to be brought out and celebrated in song, and story. It opened up the scriptures to many teachers and students for the first time. It was an opportunity for religious education to focus more fully on the trinitarian nature of the Christian faith as the use of Scripture opened up new avenues for exploring a more complete picture of revelation in the Bible (Rummery, 1975, p.16). Most Catholics up until now had very little experience of reading the Bible. This had not been encouraged and most parents were not comfortable with these new developments.

### *The 'My Way To God' Texts*

The implementation of the kerygmatic approach in Australia was facilitated by the publication of new kerygmatic textbooks for students together with substantial teacher support resources. Fr. John F. Kelly produced the *My Way To God* (Kelly, 1964) texts which were mandated by the Australian Catholic bishops for all Australian schools. These texts were colourful, had modern graphics to illustrate themes, and combined scripture study with contemporary pedagogies. Teachers were encouraged to use a variety of teaching strategies including drama, song, poetry, art and movement. This radical transition in methodology from the doctrinal approach happened swiftly – as soon as the texts were available they were expected to be used (Ryan, 2001a; Ryan, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2002). Their actual introduction depended on the teachers and their school principals, but the new texts were quickly and widely embraced. They had a standard yearly sequence that moved from the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets and kings, to the New Testament Gospels and early Church, and finally to the story of the Church until present times. This kerygmatic approach remained influential in Australian schools, especially at primary school level, until towards the end of the 1960s (Ryan, 2001a) when the life-centred/experiential emphasis became more prominent (Ryan, 2007).

### *Comments about the Kerygmatic Approach to Religious Education for this Study*

The kerygmatic approach had less than a decade of influence in Australia, but many parents and grandparents of students would remember it and their experiences would have been shaped by this approach. Some teachers were inspired to engage in biblical studies, theology and Church history (Ryan, 1997). Some others would have been threatened by these changes which removed the certainties upon which their teaching methodology had been built. These same developments had the effect of initiating the process of separation

of parents and children with respect to their experience of school religious education. It exposed the parents' lack of biblical knowledge, leaving them, or older family members, unable to contribute to the new religious education of their children at school (Ryan, 2007). Parents may have felt unable to answer questions about the Bible and, in any case, they tended to leave religious questions to schools. For some students, it was new and more engaging, but the downside was the repetitive nature of the curriculum as it moved through the same structure each year, attempting to build on the previous level, but often becoming predictable (Ryan, 2007).

### *The Experiential / Life-Centred Approach to Religious Education*

The kerygmatic approach was superseded by a change in religious education after the Second Vatican Council. This new approach emphasised personal development rather than theological content, and it interpreted personal development through relationships as a key dimension to spiritual development. A student-centred pedagogy, with a special interest in personal discussions, became prominent. This also reflected an interest in 'discovery' learning (Bruner, 1966) and the 'experiential' dimension to education. The new style 'communitarian' retreats (which replaced the older 'silent' retreats), especially for senior students, became very popular with young people and religious educators (Tullio, 2006; Flynn, 1993; Flynn and Mok, 2002). The communitarian retreat was like the flagship of the new life-centred approach to religious education.

The early 1970s was a period in Australian Catholic schools when there were fewer numbers of religious order teachers in schools (priests, brothers and nuns) as the shift back to lay teachers gained momentum. But, throughout the 1970s, many teachers of religious education were still members of religious orders, while the 1980s saw increases in the numbers of lay teachers. It was also a time of increased enrolments in Catholic schools.

The new life-centred approach placed a greater emphasis on the individual person and on individual religious experience. It was supported by factors such as the new theology of human experience emerging from the Second Vatican Council ([1962-1965], Moran, 1966a). There was a more relationship-centred spirituality developing amongst religious (nuns and brothers) personnel (who were still prominent as teachers of religious education in Catholic schools). There was teacher interest in humanistic psychology, led by Rogers (1969), Maslow (1968, 1970), Allport (1960) and others. An interest was being generated in community development as a key dimension to Catholic schooling, as endorsed by the research of Leavey (1972, 1993), and Flynn, (1975). Catholic education experienced an increase in ‘informality’ in style of pedagogy that valued personal discussions and which was believed to be consistent with the purpose of developing a sense of community.

The theological dimension to this change in approach derived from the theology of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which expanded the understanding of Revelation to include a greater awareness of the way that individuals could perceive the work of God in their own lives and in the world around them. There was also the developing awareness of a need for ‘pre-evangelisation’ to prepare students to receive the message of salvation (Nebreda, 1965). The question was raised as to whether there was a connection between the proclamation of the Word and the lived experience of the students. (Ryan, 1997).

The life-centred approach placed a new emphasis on the individual and the Revelation of God in the here and now of life. The key Vatican document underpinning this view was *Dei Verbum* (Abbott, [DV], 1965). It stated that “God, who through the Word creates all things (John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (Rom. 1:19-20)” (Abbott, [DV], 1965, 1). This

concept of ‘created realities’ authenticated the revelation of God through the daily life of believers. DV (Abbott, 1965) made it clear that Scripture and Catholic Church tradition were not the only sources of revelation, and in addition they were ‘witnesses’ to revelation (Buchanan, 2005). Two books by Moran, *Theology of Revelation* (1966a) and *Catechesis of Revelation* (1966b) provided a significant impetus to the development of thinking about the new approach, although Moran did not specifically recommend the level of ‘informality’ that eventually came to typify it.

GCD (SCC, 1971) emphasised the theological and catechetical importance of coming to know Jesus and the traditions of the Church through an exploration of life experiences (Buchanan, 2005). This was read as an endorsement of the life-centred approach. As noted above, it was influenced by developments in humanistic psychology and anthropology which emphasised the need for individuals to reflect on their life experiences to find personal truth. It was oriented towards exploring experience to better understand its emotional dimension and its importance in personal relationships. It was in this process that God and religious truth were thought to be found. The religious education process thus sought to relate the Christian story to lived experience. This implied a “faith community” model of catechesis (Rummery, 1975, p. 19). It was a less hierarchical and less authoritative model than previous models which emphasised the role of the Church as the custodian of Revelation.

Taking up the life-centred approach, *The Guidelines for Religious Education for Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (CEOM, 1973, 1984, 1995) adopted what was known as the “Four Point Plan” which aimed to help students to move through the process of Experience Shared, Reflection Deepened, Faith Expressed and Insights Reinforced (Engebretson, 1997). This development was directly linked to the work and influence of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass (1971, 1973). For Amalorpavadass, religious education had two

constituent parts: evangelisation and catechesis. Evangelisation called non-believers to faith and conversion. Catechesis sought a faith response from believers: “It is done in view of awakening, nourishing and educating their faith and of deepening and completing their initial conversion” (Amalorpavadass, 1971, p. 11). Amalorpavadass (1971, 1973) was influential in ensuring the Guidelines (1973) moved religious education away from simply the transmission of truths towards:

Initiating and educating one to a life of personal and community relationship with the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, and with one another in the world of today. (Amalorpavadass, 1971, p. 13).

This implied a relational response to God through greater sensitivity to the four dimensions of awareness in faith: awareness of self, others, the world and the faith community.

Of greatest interest to religious educators was the catechetical pedagogy that Amalorpavadass proposed as flowing from this view of revelation and faith. Since God reveals in the circumstances of human life, human life is the starting point for catechesis. (Engebretson, 1997, p. 26)

This process required the teacher to start with the lived experience of students. This then led to reflection on that experience, followed by consideration of its connection with the Church story in order to appreciate the Revelation. This could only happen if the teacher was a capable leader in the use of Scripture, liturgy and content that stimulated reflection on the Church story to confirm insights from the students’ lived experiences.

The revised Guidelines (CEOM, 1995) retained this model which was also accepted by the Ballarat diocese and the other Victorian dioceses. Underlying the life-centred approach was the expectation, as with the previous models of religious education, that students were ready for, or capable of, faith development, even if this was not clearly defined. It was often a relaxed and relatively informal method of religious education, and this contrasted with the academic orientation that was assumed in other subjects. There was much discussion but limited formal doctrinal content. Teachers were often expected

to act as leaders, facilitators and witnesses in the nurturing of adolescent faith in Catholic secondary schools.

While there was evidence that this approach was very successful on communitarian retreats (Flynn, 1993), there has been little research that has explored how extensive and how acceptable or successful this informal discussion was in practice in the 1970s. Parents may have been distanced from the religious education of their children in this different model as it differed greatly from the catechetical model the parents were familiar with from their own schooling (Rummery, 1975). Many were still adjusting to the changes flowing from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the general changes in society at this time. Other parents and teachers in Catholic secondary schools today would have experienced the life-centred approach in Catholic secondary schools. This approach was viewed by a conservative element in the Church as a threat to orthodoxy and tradition by allowing individuals freedom in exploring revelation in this way (Rossiter, 1977). This was linked to the Catholic debate on the tension between authority and freedom – a constant in Church history.

The informality of the new approach, the emphasis on discussion and the lack of academic activities that typified other subjects, inevitably resulted in the downgrading of the academic standing of religious education Catholic schools. There was often a lack of objective assessment and a minimum of assigned tasks to be completed beyond participation in discussions and reflection. The anecdotal evaluations of the approach by teachers at the time were mixed. For some, classes were regarded as ‘enjoyable’ and ‘relevant’ by both students and teachers; others found that the new approach was not satisfying for themselves or their students raising questions about whether it ever went beyond personal sharing (Lovat, 1989; Rossiter, 1981; Flynn, 1979). This contrasted with the evident success of the retreats, which were valued for generating personal sharing and

reflection resulting from the development of a sense of retreat community and close student-student and student-teacher relationships (Rummery, 1975; Lovat, 1989; Fleming, 2002). Attempts to use retreat-like activities in the classroom to generate the same sort of dynamics that were evident in retreats met with limited success and even frustration.

The life-centred approach attempted to nurture young Catholics for participation in Church life, even if students were not overtly responsive to this particular purpose. In this sense, the approach had a Church maintenance dimension. This was based not on the doctrine of the catechism or the kerygmatic proclamation of the Good News, but on positive, personal affirmation and gospel values (Ryan, 1997; Lovat, 1989). There was an assumption that students were, or could be, willing to be incorporated into the life of the Church. It was also assumed that the teachers were able to be witnesses and prophets, leading students to religious insights. There was the implication that teachers were inviting students to commitment in the Church. This meant that many teachers had to move from being an authority figure dispensing knowledge and wisdom towards the role of counsellor or even therapist. An article at the time in *Religious Education*, claimed that a primary aim for teachers of religious education was an:

attempt to establish a curative interpersonal relationship...It is not enough that religious educators have a mastery of their content. Students cannot be transformed just by exposure to brilliantly presented content any more than neurotics can be transformed just by reading a textbook on abnormal psychology. In religious education, as in psychotherapy, curative transformation is effected only with a process of interpersonal relationship (Brink, 1977, p. 410).

This emphasis led to stress for some teachers and a sense of uncertainty as the firm directions of the past were removed. It also ended, at times, in student conformity or rebellion. It was perceived that there was sometimes a lack of freedom to explore the tradition systematically to facilitate a more balanced view of that tradition. This transition from catechism to life experience took less than a decade and its influence was extensive in Australian Catholic religious education.

*Comments about the Life-Centred / Experiential Approach for this Study*

Some scholars considered that the life-centred approach was a change in methodology, but not in purpose, for religious education. Ryan (1997, p. 63) considered that the key aim was oriented to “Church maintenance”, a means by which the Church nurtured the faith of its adherents. A number of teachers at the time would have disagreed, considering that they had a stronger focus on student personal development than on induction into the Church, with the question of participation in the Church being something that the young would decide on later, rather than in religion class (Rossiter, 1978). Nevertheless, there was little doubt in the minds of students at that time that a key purpose to religious education was to encourage them to active participation in the Church (Crawford, 1982).

This perception could have limited the opportunity and the readiness of some students to explore faith related issues in a personal way in religion classes. In turn, this may have led to some conformity in younger children while prompting older students to be more critical of the religious tradition. There were opportunities for teachers to be more leaders/witnesses with students rather than authority figures of the Church. This made some in the Church concerned that there was too much freedom and not sufficient direction in doctrine and Church discipline. Some students and teachers responded positively to this chance for personal sharing and increased intimacy, but others were threatened or simply did not engage constructively in the processes (Ryan, 1997; Lovat, 1989; Rossiter, 1999). This approach did not relate well to the pedagogies used in other curriculum areas and as such religious education could be seen as separate, and not an ‘academic’ subject. There were some concerns that the life-centred approach was too focussed on the current lived experience as the way of experiencing God, to the exclusion of other aspects of Revelation (Flynn, 1979). There were also concerns that this approach was too unstructured, without a solid educational foundation. Students may not have been

aware of the hoped-for outcomes of these religious education sessions compared to their experiences in other more structured curriculum areas.

The intention of the approach was to increase the emphasis on the experiential and to enhance the quest for personalism and relevance (Rossiter, 1999). Crawford and Rossiter (2006) considered that the groundswell that carried the life-centred approach was animated by the development of a “psychological Christian spirituality” on the part of the religious personnel in Catholic schools at the time, a spirituality that eventually became the most prominent expression of spirituality in Australian Catholicism among lay people as well. This spirituality had been affected by humanistic psychology as evident in the works of Maslow (1966, 1968), Rogers (1951, 1961, 1969) and Allport (1950, 1960) and it tended to focus on the individual in personal development. This personal development emphasis could reinforce self-centredness and a lack of connection to the larger picture of God, Church community and faith history (Rossiter, 1999).

While supporting the aims, Rossiter (1999) questioned the means used to try to achieve relevance and personalism. The processes employed at this time may have been valuable in the retreat or voluntary group setting, but may not have been suitable for the classroom because they were too informal and lacked academic rigour (Rossiter, 1999). Engebretson (2002) noted that there were increasing pressures that challenged the homogeneity of belief and religious practice in students such as individualism of belief and rejection of mainstream churches as mediators of faith. There was also “a general questioning of an overtly catechetical approach to religious education” (Engebretson, 2002, p. 38).

Since the life-centred approach influenced the way religious education was offered in Catholic schools in Victoria, and elsewhere in Australia, it may have affected the current thinking of the participants in this study.

### *The Shared Christian Praxis Approach to Religious Education*

The Shared Christian Praxis [SCP] approach was pertinent to this study as it was the preferred model for religious education in the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum mandated for schools in the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat. SCP was based on the work of Thomas Groome (1980, 1991, 1998, 2008), who recognized the significance of life experience in religious education. He encouraged self-reflection in an educational context, which was intended to help motivate the individual towards action in response to a dialogue between personal life experience and the Christian vision and story. As Welbourne (1997) noted, Groome (1980) combined religious education history with educational theory. That is, Groome balanced past history with present experience and emphasised that religious education needed to be informed and shaped by the best of current understandings of education. Welbourne (1997) described Groome's approach as 'disclosure' and 'discovery' as the individual held his/her experience up against the Christian story and moved towards a transformation which was linked with a continuity with the Christian story of the past (Welbourne, 1997, p.2). This was not an approach that was trying to create a social reconstruction; rather, it was aimed at a personal change that would lead to future action that may challenge the delivery of justice within society. Groome first developed this catechetical process as a means of building faith with adult believers and those actively seeking answers to faith questions. For Groome,

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).

The essence of this definition of SCP was the successful marriage of education in faith with what Groome considered to be rigorous educational practice. Groome's work encouraged religious education to move forward in the era after the Second Vatican

Council (1962-1965), towards the status of an educationally sound curriculum option. Groome (1980, 1991, 1998) built SCP on the educational theories of Jurgan Habermas who identified three areas of human interest (Engebretson, 1997): technical interest led to knowledge based upon empirical investigation and governed by technical rules; hermeneutical interest which resulted in an interpretative way of knowing developed through dialogue; and emancipatory interest which was associated with knowledge gained through personal reflection leading to a transformed consciousness or changes in perspective. Here the individual took control for 'discovering' knowledge in relation to previous experiences and knowledge. Habermas' theories were largely concerned with the emancipatory way of learning which led to critique and reflection and subsequently to new knowledge, liberation and change (Lovat, 1988).

Groome translated Habermas' emancipatory way of knowing into a shared praxis approach to religious education (Engebretson, 1997). 'Praxis' referred to an action-reflection process. Students first share their lived experience and then reflect on this to analyse its impact on the individual or community. Following this, there is to be sharing of the Christian vision and story through discussion and dialogue of how things should be in the light of the Christian story. This leads to a comparison of the Christian vision and the present reality as experienced by the students. The final stages of the praxis involve reflection and decision to act in order to bridge the gap between the present reality and the Christian vision and story. This progression through the Movements towards future action is dependent on the reflection, dialogue and participation in the previous movements being accepted by the students (Bezzina, Gahan, McLenaghan & Wilson, 1997).

The contributions of developmental theorists such as Fowler (1981, 1991) were acknowledged by Groome (1991) who believed that this approach would allow people of all stages of faith development to critique their experiences, gain exposure to the Christian

story and move towards an appropriate response for their stage of readiness. Groome (1980, 1991) and Ryan & Malone (1996) agreed that one of the keys to successful praxis was how the teacher interpreted the approach and then implemented it. Great religions, including Christianity and other major faiths, needed to be presented as spiritual wisdom that could be resourced as people grow in their spirituality (Groome, 2008). This was an acknowledgment of the need for suitable pedagogy in order to present faith and reason as partners in a fully relevant religious education. By this, Groome (2008) was stating that students needed to learn from the spiritual wisdom of religion as well as to learn about it. In other words Groome (2008, p. 4) was stating that “there should be no such thing as religious education that does not engage and shape people’s lives”. Groome (2008) was, therefore, proposing a partnership between catechesis and religious education that was dependent on the pedagogy employed to implement this union.

*Comments about the Shared Christian Praxis Approach to Religious Education for this Study*

SCP has been influential in the religious education curriculum documentations of a number of dioceses including Canberra Goulburn, Parramatta and recently in the collaborative development of guidelines for the Victorian dioceses of Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale with the Archdiocese of Hobart. These dioceses have endorsed the SCP framework with consideration to adapting Groome’s original process to cater for a variety of situations. There have been some in the religious education field who questioned the application of this process within modern, pluralist classrooms (Rossiter 1988, 1997; Lovat 1991; Ryan & Malone 1996, Ryan, 1997; Raduntz, 1994). The SCP model, as proposed by Groome (1991), aimed to build towards ‘faith sharing’ within the Christian tradition. SCP was gaining momentum in Australia at the same time as diversity and

pluralism were on the increase in Catholic schools. This created difficulties for teachers who wondered if the religious education classroom was, strictly speaking, a faith community in the same sense that a parish was a voluntary community of faith. The reality of the multi-faith classroom, with its variance in religious commitment, raised questions about how effective it was to pursue the goal of faith development, as if this could be activated or engaged directly in the classroom; or whether faith development was not an immediate *objective*, but a long term *hope*. Some educators considered that all religious education classrooms were ‘faith communities’, even if they were diverse (Bezzina, et al, 1997). Groome (1991) considered that teachers needed to respect the freedom of students to respond in accord with their current stage of faith development. Christian religious education that separated ‘education’ and ‘formation in faith’ was regarded by Groome (1991) as invalid.

Concerns were expressed that catechetical models, such as SCP, “offer fewer options for ways to respond to the greater awareness and sensitivity towards other religious traditions” (Ryan, 1999, p. 21). SCP, as described by Groome (1991, 1998), was seen by Ryan (1997) to be not valid for the contemporary religious education classroom as it was not a gathering of committed Christians. There were also concerns that teachers would not fully engage with the full praxis model due to a lack of confidence and knowledge in how to assist students to critique the Christian story for their own lives (Ryan, 1997). The view was expressed that, despite the adaptations to Groome’s original adult praxis approach for schools, SCP still had implicit and explicit assumptions that failed to address the needs of the contemporary religious education classroom (Rossiter, 1997). The value of SCP for small faith gatherings was affirmed by Lovat (1991), but he questioned whether this could be used without modification in the compulsory religious education classroom.

Others, such as Welbourne (1995), believed that SCP could be modified to accommodate contemporary religious education classrooms. She considered that education in religion should embody sound educational practice. However, a question emerged as to how far SCP could be modified from its original intention before it lost the essence of its founding principles. The Dioceses of Parramatta and the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn had completed what they believed were successful adaptations of the Groome model and had incorporated revisions to their original curriculum plans. These revised plans formed the initial stimulus material for the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) developments.

SCP was incorporated as the basic tool for planning units of religious education in the school. It was, therefore, of interest to examine how the model was understood by parents and teachers. Concerns were raised about situations where SCP was taken on as the only approach to be used in religious education classrooms (Ryan, 2007). It was argued that this might stifle teaching and lead to overly predictable class lesson structures which compromised best teaching practice. Flexibility was needed in order to be able to respond to the needs of students. SCP gained support as a framework but not a prescriptive formula for teaching (Bezzina, 1997). This framework would allow a variety of teaching strategies to be incorporated into the various movements. The approach could then be described as a natural approach to learning that had everyday connections, as people critically reflected on their experiences in the light of a larger family or community story in order to form future actions. This study addresses the degree to which parents and teachers understand the foundations of SCP and to what extent the expectations of the parents and the teachers correlate with the goals of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum outcomes.

### *Typological and Phenomenological Approaches to Religious Education*

The phenomenological approach to religious education was developed in British county (state) schools in the early 1970s as a method for studying world religions (Grimmitt, 1973). It was primarily descriptive in approach, attending to the six (and eventually seven) dimensions of religion according to Smart (1968, 1969, 1973) who was a key figure in this development. The dimensions, or aspects, of religion, according to Smart, were the ritual dimension, the mythological dimension, the doctrinal dimension, the ethical dimension, the social dimension, and the experiential dimension (Smart, 1969). Australian state-based religion studies programs, while their theoretical basis was established in Government reports on religious education in the 1970s, were not introduced until the 1990s – with the exception of the Tasmanian course which dated from the 1970s. The Australian programs were influenced by developments in Britain (Ryan, 2007).

The typological approach was an extension of the phenomenological approach which focused on studying different types of religious phenomena such as sacred stories, sacred places, rituals of initiation, sacred people, etc. It was developed by Habel and Moore (1982) working in the Adelaide College of Advanced Education. While specifically geared to the purpose of teaching religion studies programs, it was also intended to have application in religious schools, and this possibility was noted in the attention it recommended to studying the ‘home tradition’.

In the main, the use of phenomenological and typological approaches was limited to state-based religion studies programs – for example, the Victorian Religion and Society study design for years 11-12. Catholic schools that adopted religion studies courses would then have used those approaches at these year levels. While the teaching of the accredited courses, which had academic status along with other senior school subjects, tended to enhance the academic respectability of religious education in the schools that

adopted them, there is no evidence that their presence in the senior school resulted in the use of phenomenology in the primary and junior secondary classes – where religious education remained in tune with Catholic diocesan guidelines.

Hence, phenomenology and typology were not mainstream approaches in Catholic school religious education, although they were used in senior classes. These approaches were not classified as confessional, that is, professing a commitment to a particular religious tradition (Ryan, 1999) – and hence were in contrast with a catechetical or faith-oriented model. Both phenomenology and typology implied an education about religion, as opposed to an education in faith.

These approaches proposed that religions could be examined in terms of constituent elements according to the various dimensions and types as noted above. This provided a framework for the analysis of religious traditions without the expectations of promoting personal faith development in pupils. It was not that a change in personal faith was precluded, but their immediate educational goals were in terms of knowledge and skills related to the study of religion. The broad aim of these approaches, sometimes incorrectly labelled as comparative religions study, was to improve knowledge and tolerance of the range of religious traditions in the country. The phenomenological approach sought to have students ‘step into the shoes’ of those from other religious traditions (Lovat, 1989, p. 64). It was, therefore, more than simply learning about that tradition. It proposed imaginative identification with the religious faith of others with the idea of promoting empathy – a difficult objective to achieve.

The religious education curriculum of the school at the centre of this research shows such the presence of these approaches in the senior years where the religion studies course *Religion and Society* is taught. This course is a major component of the senior religious education offered in the school.

*Comments about the Phenomenological and Typological Approaches for this Study*

The phenomenological and typological approaches gained acceptance in Catholic schools in Australia to the extent that they adopted state-based religion studies courses in Years 11 and 12. They were academically accredited courses which had set content. This increased the academic credibility of religious education in the eyes of some students, parents and teachers. It is likely that the academic accreditation was more attractive to teachers and school authorities than an appreciation of the theoretical underpinnings of these approaches. These courses also had an appropriateness related to the increasingly multi-faith, multi-cultural mix in Catholic schools. Teachers reported improved satisfaction as a consequence of teaching these subjects, as noted by Ryan (1999):

Teachers involved in study of religion courses attest almost universally to improvement in their own levels of satisfaction in teaching, in the interest and engagement of students and in the quality of students' work.

(Ryan, 1999, p. 24)

This was generally credited to the perception that the work students engaged in was academically challenging and contributed towards the university entrance process. It raised the status of religious education to that of other curriculum areas undertaken by students. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) pointed out that the situation was more complex than this. Student engagement depended on whether or not they freely opted for participation in religion studies courses – in a number of Catholic schools where religion studies was compulsory for Year 11-12 students, there may have been better academic engagement than for non-accredited Catholic courses, but there was still a measure of student negativity and unwilling engagement as far as religion studies was concerned.

Questions can be raised about the appropriateness and relevance to students of phenomenological and typological approaches. Ryan (1999) considered that their

predominantly 'descriptive' pedagogy was not as challenging as approaches that were more personally challenging. Were approaches like SCP more likely to promote student 'faith development'? According to Lovat's (2002) classification of approaches, were phenomenological and typological approaches not as effective as so-called faith-forming approaches? Crawford and Rossiter (2006) proposed that this sort of thinking about the faith intensive nature of pedagogies was dysfunctional, claiming that it was unrealistic to talk about teachers being able to use pedagogies that were directly faith-forming or not. They considered that faith was such a complex, personal 'relationship' with the divine, that its promotion was a long term hope and not something that could be regarded as an immediate educational outcome of religious education. Their concern about phenomenological and typological approaches, which echoed the critique of Grimmitt (1987, 2000), was the preponderance of descriptive content in these approaches that was not as relevant to contemporary student needs and interests as a more issue-oriented content. Irrespective of whether approaches and content can be classified and evaluated according to how effective they are as faith-enhancing activities, concerns can be raised about the appropriateness in Catholic schools of having phenomenological and typological approaches as the exclusive method or criteria for determining content. In the Church school, there is a need for the experiential religious activities like prayer, reflection, liturgy and retreats which have legitimately 'hoped-for' outcomes in terms of faith and spiritual development (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

Taylor (1993) emphasised the need to have a broad base of experiences and study that allowed for personal faith responses and a more academic dimension to suit individual students. This has been the approach of the school in the research, where religion studies in Years 11-12 are complemented with retreats, seminar days, liturgies, prayer and meditation experiences and a range of voluntary social justice groups and projects. While

the intentions of those who developed the phenomenological and typological approaches were explicitly educational, the so-called educational approach to Catholic school religious education was different as explained in the following section.

*The Educational (or 'Subject-oriented') Approaches to Religious Education*

An approach to religious education which was labelled as educational was a blend of developments from earlier approaches rather than a totally new approach. What was new was the increased emphasis on religion as a subject with outcomes, assessment, exams, student written work and research. This approach differentiated between teaching people religion and teaching people to be religious in a particular way (Moran, 1997). Both of these aspects were needed in the Catholic school, but the specific role of classroom religious education was to emphasise the former. The approach aimed to develop religiously literate learners who could engage in religious reflection concerning important contemporary issues. As suggested by Crawford and Rossiter (2006), an open, inquiring study of religion makes the best possible long term contribution towards enhancing the personal faith of students that can be achieved in the classroom. Students could take the knowledge and skills acquired through the educational processes and apply these to their personal faith journey. The immediate educational objectives of the classroom practices in the educational approach were not explicitly catechetical in terms of expecting faith development.

One of the problems with the naming of this approach as educational is that it makes a presumed pejorative judgment that other approaches are somehow not educational and therefore conflicts with the claims of their protagonists. For example, those who used kerygmatic and life-centred approaches in the 1960s and 1970s were explicit about their concern to be educational. Similarly, theorists who developed and used SCP,

phenomenology and typology were at pains to explain the educational value in their approaches. From their perspective, there would be no substantial reason why their approach could not be classified as 'educational'. Hence Rossiter (2008) considered that the word 'subject-oriented' was a less problematic description of the approach. It highlighted the overall format of an academic subject, given that the word 'academic' was meant to include all of the creative pedagogies that could be used in any other key learning area, and was not prejudiced in favour of 'intellectual' knowledge (Rossiter, personal correspondence, 2008).

The development of the educational approach was influenced by educational innovations and theories which became more prominent in Catholic schools from the early 1980s. It built on a groundswell of theoretical developments over a long period of time (Moran, 1980, 1997; Harris and Moran, 1998; Groome, 1991, 1998; Goldman, 1965; Rummery, 1970, 1975, 2001; Rossiter, 1982, 2005; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Malone, 1984, 1992; Lovat, 1989, 1995, 1998; Habel and Moore, 1982). This approach emphasised the need to consider the findings of the human sciences such as psychology and sociology when planning religious education. This pursuit of educationally sound principles for religious education had been at the foundation of Catholic religious education guidelines since the 1980s.

One of the key figures in introducing this approach to Australia was Gerard Rummery (1975). He had studied in England at a time when there was much debate about the role of religious education in state schools. This approach by Rummery (1975) built on the ideas of Smart (1968) in advocating a religious education process that taught *about* religion as opposed to educating *into* a religious tradition. Teachers in Catholic schools faced the situation where many of the students were not a part of the Catholic faith community with shared beliefs (Rummery, 1975). This challenged the suitability of

catechetical approaches in the classroom. Following on this work were others such as Crawford and Rossiter (1985, 1988, 2006) who saw the opportunities for students to investigate the ways that their faith traditions could contribute to personal and communal faith development, but to do so in an atmosphere of academic freedom (as expected in other subjects) that enhanced student research, critical interpretation and evaluation, and informed debate.

*Comments on the Educational Approach to Religious Education for this Study*

The educational approach reflected the growing awareness of the role of religious education as being seen as an academic study equal to any other subject in the school curriculum. To do this successfully, there was a need to raise the academic profile by aligning it more closely with current educational practice. The changing demographic of religious education classrooms required a more appropriate approach to religious education that catered for the needs of a pluralist faith environment. The educational approach was able to provide the knowledge of the Catholic tradition for those who sought personal faith within this tradition, but it helped provide religious literacy for all students and it challenged teachers to address the range of issues associated with a multi-faith classroom. It also challenged the school to provide alternative opportunities for the more experiential, personal and reflective dimensions to religious education beyond the classroom (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). For this research, it is pertinent to investigate whether teachers and parents relate to this understanding of religious education or whether they expect a more catechetical model and more explicit talk about 'faith' outcomes. Also, there is the question of the academic subject status of religion in comparison with other areas of the curriculum. The research reported in this thesis also investigated how teachers and parents perceived the role of teachers within the educational approach,

especially in terms of greater demands for religious literacy from teachers in the areas of theology, Scripture and Church history.

The educational approach has had its critics such as Goosen (1990) and Groome (1991) who have questioned the distinction between catechesis and religious education as advocated by Rossiter (1988) and others. This research explored whether parents have these concerns and whether teachers were comfortable with the approach in use, which attempts to use modern educational methods within a framework that was originally catechetical.

#### The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) Religious Education Curriculum of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat

The Ballarat Catholic Diocese mandated the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) as an initiative to provide sequential, consistent and comprehensive religious education across all primary and secondary schools in the Ballarat diocese. Section 2.1 of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) attempts to address contemporary changes and challenges in Catholic education and in religious education, in particular, in such a way as to acknowledge the “Directions in Australian society” (p.19); “Changes in the Catholic community” (p. 19); “Changes in Catholic schools” (p. 20); “Directions in Church teaching on Catholic schools” (p.20) and “Directions in the Australian educational context” (p. 20-21). *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) was the result of a multi-diocesan collaboration of leaders in religious education as described in the previous chapter. This working party developed materials originally supplied by the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn which were based on those of the Diocese of Parramatta.

The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum framework is structured around eight content areas or strands which provide sequential development for students from the

beginning of primary school until the completion of secondary school. The strands relevant to the secondary school religious education curriculum are Christian Prayer, Sacraments, Religion and Society, God, Christian Life, Jesus Christ, Scripture, and Church. The secondary school religious education curriculum has three levels: Level 5 for Years 7 and 8, Level 6 for Years 9 and 10, and Post-Compulsory Years for Years 11 and 12. The school which was the focus of the research bases its Years 7 to 10 religious education curriculum around *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and then includes units from the Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE] in Years 11 and 12 alongside a school-based program of retreats, seminar days and community service as described in Table 3.3.

*Table 3.3 Foundations of religious education across the year levels*

Years Level	<i>Awakenings</i> – 8 strands	Retreats	Seminar Days	VCE units	Community Service
7 and 8	Yes	No	No	Not applicable	Within class time
9 and 10	Yes	Yes (1 day each year)	No	Not applicable	Within class time
11	No	Yes (2 days)	Yes (1 day)	Yes	Yes (20 hours) in personal time
12	No	Yes (5 days)	Yes (3 days)	Optional	Yes (20 hours) in personal time

Although the school does not directly use *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) unit outlines for the senior Years 11 and 12, there is a concerted attempt to address the relevant year level outcomes of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) within the alternative program in these years. The school considers it desirable to have an alternative approach to religious education at these year levels to address particular student needs while also ensuring that students had the opportunity to develop many of the key theological and spiritual goals of the school,

and of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) in the final years at the school. The Catholic Education Office, through the Religious Education Centre, was informed of the developments and encouraged the school to pursue the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) outcomes as fully as possible.

Each level of the school has units with outcomes and doctrinal concepts that are to be addressed at that level. The provision of support materials and professional development for religious education staff has been an ongoing process since *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) was introduced in the diocesan schools. The school in this study has been attempting to implement these curriculum guidelines since the mandated time. The school took the outcomes of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and adapted religious education units that existed prior to the new curriculum materials and developed new unit outlines that reflected the expectations and direction of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) program. The whole school staff was introduced to the principles underpinning *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and the religious education faculty in particular was assisted in the transition to the new approach. This assistance came from the Catholic Education Office in Ballarat and from the Religious Education Co-ordinator [REC] in the school. The outcomes of the units of work in the religious education curriculum of the school are provided for parents on the school's website and constant information given to parents through the school's newsletters and at parent gatherings, when appropriate, during the year.

### Catholic Identity and Religious Education

The notion of developing a Catholic religious identity has always been implicit in Catholic documentation for religious education, even where the word 'identity' is not specifically used. The need for appropriate Catholic role models in schools as students searched for and developed their understanding of self and their religious identity was noted by Rossiter

(1997). However, Rossiter (1997) reflected the concerns of Catholic educators about what constituted a contemporary Catholic identity, how this related to personal identity and about how these identities could best be nurtured in schools. Rymarz (2006) considered that the acquisition of a Catholic identity was problematic for young people given their lack of knowledge of theology and Catholic tradition (Rymarz, 2006). Therefore, the roles of the religious education curriculum and teachers of religious education were regarded as important for assisting young people to access the knowledge, culture and personal example needed to resource their reflection about their own identity as members of a Catholic school community. Schweitzer (2007) and Crush and Francis (2001) noted that plurality, or pluralism, was one of the challenges facing religious educators. Education could be seen as a support for students in the reshaping of their religious identity, but education could not be held up as the means by which this identity was created (Schweitzer, 2007). His study found that German youth were engaged in a process of individualization, whereby they did not accept the faith propositions of any particular religious tradition, but chose to personalise their faith beliefs and practices (Schweitzer, 2007).

This finding was similar to the experiences of young people in Australia (Mason, et al, 2007; Rossiter, 2006; de Souza, 2003; Tacey, 2003). Despite hindrances for identity development in youth, the Catholic school still regards it as important to provide young people with unconditional access to identity building resources, both in formal religious education and in adult role modelling. It is hoped that these resources may be helpful, even if this is in the long term. Whether or not young people actively assimilate Catholic culture into their personal identity, the school retains a commitment to providing cultural resources for their identity development.

## Parents and Religious Education – Other Relevant Literature

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that the Catholic Church regarded parents as the ‘first educators in faith’ of their children. Parents were said to be “irreplaceable agents in the education of their children” (CCE, 1988, n. 28). Similar sentiments were expressed in GCD (SSC, 1972) and CT (John Paul II, 1979). The importance of parents in the education of their children is taken up in the literature of state education authorities such as the Department of Education and Children's Services, Government of South Australia (2008a, 2008b), the Department of Education, Government of Tasmania (2008), and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Government of Victoria (2008). These documents reflect a similar view to that in the Catholic Church documents regarding parents as ‘partners’ in the school education of children. They were also explicit in stating that parents and community were to be part of the process for setting future directions of schools.

The involvement of parents in a particular Lutheran school in South Australia was examined by Cooper (1994) who pointed towards a significant partnership between the school and the parents, but noted that there were differences in the ways that this partnership was viewed by the parents and school. Cooper examined partnership as parent involvement or participation in schools. In his consideration of praxis learning, Lovat (1989) suggested that parents should have the opportunity to engage with the learning processes and have a real ‘understanding’ of the aims and practice of the school by contrast with ‘knowing about’ these dimensions (Dykstra, 1987). Cooper (1994) found that a number of parents regarded the school as the ‘educational expert’, seeing themselves as ‘educational consumers’. Therefore, they had little ‘involvement’ with the school as they ‘participated’ in the school passively. This was not the sort of partnership envisaged in the Catholic documents or in the state government documents. However, it seemed to

reflect the attitude of many parents who felt a sense of confusion, separateness or inadequacy (Mackay, 1993, 1997, 1999), which often led to a feeling that they were not valued, that they did not really belong, and that their role was to passively support the school agenda.

In a study of parents and teachers in a primary school, Hogan (1994) set out to see whether 'faith education' was considered to be a partnership or not. Beare (1984), referred to by Hogan, stated that participation was a parental right and a responsibility in the education of their children, whereas involvement implied either some coercion or an invitation to take part in school activities. This raised questions about the nature of the participation of parents in schools, particularly in the area of religious education. The work of Berger (1987), Lombana (1983) and Ost (1988) indicated that the quality of the parent-school relationships was grounded in the communication skills of the parents and teachers (Hogan, 1994).

Ost (1988) considered that the gradual separation of schools from parents over the years was accompanied by diminishing communication. Proposed solutions were the improvement of teacher communication skills and increased parental knowledge of specific subjects. Flynn (1979) found that there was an assumption that the family role was to supplement the school and, therefore, there was little need for communication. Cooper's (1994) results were similar where parents accepted the support role, but some were disappointed with the level of genuine participation available to them. Cooper showed that most parents felt that being a general support to the school was sufficient while others expected to be encouraged to engage actively with the teachers and to have some input into curriculum.

Within the Lutheran schools of Cooper's (1994) research, there was a strong confessional aim for religious education, but it was thought that many parents may not

have been aware of the implicit and explicit values and beliefs that underpinned religious education. Cooper (1994) found that parents who were strongly attached to the religious tradition expected the school to advocate confessional aims and for the school to exhibit Christian role modelling. It was also found that some of the parents who were not aligned with a religious tradition wanted the study of Church doctrine and practices to be replaced with a general moral education. This research reported in this thesis investigated the extent to which parents expected the school to advocate specific Catholic teaching in the religious education curriculum.

While the research considered above was not conclusive in showing that the parent/teacher partnership in regard to religious education was different from that for other curriculum areas, Cooper (1994) suggested that this was the case. There is anecdotal evidence to support the theory that parents generally do not feel a need to be familiar with the religious education curriculum or with their children's involvement. Few religious education teachers in the school are sought for voluntary interviews at parent-teacher meetings while teachers of other subjects such as maths, languages, science and English regularly have full interview schedules. Leavey (1972), Flynn (1975), Fahy (1980) and Rossiter (1983) all supported the notion that the school can have an influence on the religious identity of students somewhat independent from the main family influence. This study provided opportunities for parents and teachers to talk about how differences between parental and school expectations can affect students.

Marcellin Flynn examined aspects related to students, teachers and parents in relation to Catholic schools, with particular relevance to Catholic secondary schools. Through his work, (1975, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn and Mok, 2002), Flynn engaged in a longitudinal study of Catholic schools, their effectiveness and their nature. Flynn was interested in the importance of the Catholic school as integral to the ongoing mission of the

Church in the contemporary world. He investigated student engagement with the Catholic tradition, especially the areas of personal faith and participation in the sacraments of the Church. Also of significance to Flynn was the quality of school life experienced by students and staff in Catholic schools. These same issues are addressed in this thesis in relation to the views of parents and teachers.

Flynn (1975) framed the questions that were explored in the later works, leading to the Flynn and Mok (2002) study that allowed the longitudinal perspective to be applied. This was summarised by McArthur (2005), where he noted the following: a) The main theme in the 1975 book was ‘Do we need the schools now?’ b) The 1979 focus was on ‘A rationale for schools. c) In 1985, Flynn examined ‘How good are the schools?’ d) A key consideration in 1993 was that ‘Culture explains why the schools are so effective.’ e) The final report in 2002 dealt with ‘The continuing importance of the schools’ (McArthur, 2005, p.6).

Flynn (1975) found that Catholic schools were effective witnesses to the Gospel and that the faith of the students was supported by the way that the schools were organised. In this study, it was also noted that a supportive community was needed for faith transmission to be effective. Flynn (1979) provided a theoretical foundation for Catholic schools which greatly assisted Catholic teachers to frame their role and the purpose of the school. This study is related to similar areas of investigation.

By 1985, Flynn had confirmed that there was great respect given to Catholic schools. It was shown that a supportive social climate was necessary for a highly effective Catholic school. Alongside this, his research found that the quality of the teachers was integral to the effectiveness of the school (Flynn, 1985). It was also affirmed that the schools needed to be proactive in supporting, and defining a distinctive Catholic identity of the school through the religious education curricula and through the social

climate generated in the school (Flynn, 1985). With diminishing numbers of religious in the schools, lay teachers were seen to be successful in continuing the work of Catholic schools established by the religious orders. Academic achievement was closely linked to the quality of relationships present in the school (Flynn, 1985). Academic achievement in the senior school is an issue specifically relevant to this study and to the views of parents and teachers.

In the 1993 study, Flynn explored the religious and academic influence of the Catholic school. The successful schools were seen to have a culture that permeated all aspects of the school life. This was seen to extend into the presence of close working partnerships with parents for highly effective schooling. Again, there was an emphasis on the importance of committed Catholic teachers, who developed quality relationships with the students. Flynn (1993) noted the growth of a division between student satisfaction with school and teachers, and dissatisfaction with some aspects of Church and its teachings. This study confirmed the need for complementary roles in religious education for home, school and Church (Flynn, 1993; Crawford and Rossiter, 1985; Leavey et al, 1992; Fahy, 1992). This study investigated this connection between home and school from the parents and teachers perspective.

The final in the series of studies was conducted in 1998 and published in 2002 (Flynn and Mok, 2002), and this study continued previous research. It was found that most students had difficulty with the relevance of religious education to their lives and viewed it less favourably against other subjects in terms of the quality of education that it offered. This was reinforced with less than one in five students taking religious education seriously and the presence of a general negativity to religious education (Flynn and Mok, 2002). The study suggested that some parents supported replacing religious education classes with retreats and engaging liturgies in the senior school (Rossiter, 2002). This is

directly relevant to this study as the school in this study has a senior religious education program based on retreats, seminars and liturgies, blended with academic religious education classes.

Students claimed that religion was important, but were attending the sacraments, and practising prayer in lower numbers. The students valued the teachers and the school, but not the Church and doctrine (Flynn and Mok, 2002). At the same time, the teachers were looking for a balanced approach to religious and human development for students (McArthur, 2005). Flynn had found that, over time, the credibility, and popularity, of the Catholic school remained high, and increased, although the credibility of the Church fell. Parental satisfaction with the school in the study was examined, as was the parental link to Church.

Marcellin Flynn was able to instigate and report on a range of important factors that have had an impact on the quality of religious education offered in Catholic schools. Many of these factors are of interest to this study of the expectations of teachers and parents in relation to religious education. Flynn was consistent in his concern about the relevance of religious education to the students during his studies. Similarly, this research examines a range of factors which influence the way that religious education is seen as relevant by teachers and parents in the school in the study.

As noted earlier, of the many writings and research studies about parental involvement in education, there are very few recent references that deal with the area of religious education, especially at secondary school level. For example, there is only one specific reference (Morse, 1999) to parents in the titles of articles in the *Journal of Religious Education* from the years 1996 to 2008. The roles and expectations of parents in religious education is not a prominent area of interest in religious education journals. No references to 'parents in religious education' were found in the *British Journal of*

*Religious Education* and in the *Journal of Christian Education* for the three years (2003-2006). This study addresses the lack of attention to this topic.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the literature related to the nature and purpose of religious education, to the role of teachers of religious education and to the role of parents in religious education. This has been sourced from the documents of the Roman Catholic Church and from a range of authors whose work summarises or reflects upon the developments of the religious education process as it applies to Catholic secondary schools in Australia. Each of the major developments in the field of religious education in Australia over the past 50 years has been described, and its relevance to this study has been noted and commented upon. The following is a brief summary of the key points to arise in the chapter.

The documents of the Catholic Church show a gradual transition from a catechetical focus for religious education towards a greater awareness of the need for a sound educational basis for classroom practice. Changes in westernised societies led towards a more secular, individualised, pluralist spirituality which is reflected in Catholic school students and their families. In response, the Church documents have focused more on evangelisation and pre-evangelisation than on catechising believers. The Church is still supportive of the school's role in providing opportunities for students to grow in faith and knowledge of the Catholic tradition, but it recognises the limitations of the traditional expectations of students being part of a practising Catholic family.

The documents are supportive of teachers in Catholic schools and repeatedly acknowledge their valuable contribution to the religious development of students. The documents place high expectations on teachers to be witnesses to faith in their lives and in

their relationships with students. There is also an expectation that parents support the school's efforts in religious education. This leads to a distinction being made between the role of the school and the family in young people's faith development. The parents are the first educators in faith and as such have the responsibility to nurture their children's faith by participation in the life of the Church. The school, and its teachers, are not expected to have the major responsibility for faith development in students.

The school must share the Christian vision and story and assist students to reflect on this as it relates to their own lives, encouraging students to move towards action, which brings the lived reality of their lives closer to the Christian vision. This process is the foundation of SCP, which is the preferred model for religious education in the school in the research. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) provide the structure in which this praxis model is to be implemented in the school's formal religious education curriculum.

The second section of the chapter covers the historical developments of religious education in Australia, which may have had an impact on the way that religious education is perceived by parents and teachers within the study. There was a movement from a doctrinal model where the transmission of knowledge and practices of the Catholic Church were supported by the use of catechisms. These question and answer summaries of Catholic doctrine provided clarity in knowing the faith tradition, but did not encourage a personalised examination of the doctrines. This method was in use until the 1960s when the kerygmatic approach, based on the proclamation of scripture as the source of Revelation, came into prominence. The key Catholic textbooks at this time in Australia were *My Way To God* (Kelly, 1964) and the updated 'Green' and 'Red' catechisms for primary and secondary classes respectively.

This was the start of a more student-centred approach to religious education which developed further in the life-centred approach of the 1970s. This was the religious

education model experienced by many of the parents when they were in Catholic secondary schools. Foundational to this model was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) teaching on Revelation as having a living reality that could be experienced in daily life through reflection on God working in the lives of people. This was influential in the establishment of religious education guidelines adopted for the CDB (2005) in which the school in the research is located. Since this model was introduced, there has been a movement towards more educational models which make use of the current educational insights and methodologies available to other curriculum areas.

The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education guidelines adapted SCP of Thomas Groome (1980, 1991). This was a process which may be unfamiliar to parents and teachers, but was one which may be seen by them as being similar to the life-centred model, although founded on different key educational principles. The final development in religious education that affects this study was the use of phenomenology and typology. This was prominent in senior school state-based religion studies courses accredited for university entrance assessment. The research study school has these models for religious education in the final two years of secondary education.

The third section of this chapter deals with the literature on parents and religious education. The key point made in this section is that there is little direct literature on the topic as it relates to the research study. There is evidence in journals of discussions of the nature and purpose of religious education and some attention to the role of the teachers of religious education, but there are few articles about parents and religious education, a fact which makes the introductory study described in this thesis very significant.

## Issues that have arisen in the Literature for Examination in this Thesis

A number of issues have been identified in this chapter that informed the development of questionnaire and interview schedules in this research. It is of interest to explore the extent to which doctrinal formula and transmission of knowledge play a prominent part in religious education. The importance to parents and teachers of texts to support the teaching of religious education in the Catholic secondary school is an area for investigation. It is of interest to investigate the extent to which evaluation or assessment of the knowledge of the Catholic-Christian tradition is a priority for parents and teachers. The research explored the importance of Scripture and liturgy, and the variety and extent of liturgical and prayer experiences as part of religious education in the school. An issue arose in the chapter regarding the relevance of the religious education curriculum to students' life experience, and how educationally and academically equal religious education is seen as an area of the curriculum.

The chapter raised issues about the levels of parental and teacher awareness of SCP and the importance of faith development through religious education. The research explores questions raised about support for the current approaches to religious education in the senior years of the school. The expectations of parents and teachers for religious education were studied alongside the level of parental interest and involvement in what takes place in classrooms.

It is also of interest to explore the extent to which parents see themselves as the first educators of faith for their children, the relationship of this principle to the school religious education program, and the priority given by parents to religious education in various levels of the school. The expectations of parents about the level of involvement of children in social justice activities and the role of religious education in the spiritual

development of the children are also issues of interest. How these issues were studied is explained in the following chapter which presents the research design of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to investigate the views of parents and teachers in relation to various aspects of religious education. This research project was conducted within a single Catholic secondary school in a major rural centre in Victoria, Australia. The research was conducted with the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix C). The data collection methods were questionnaire survey and individual interviews. The research design included both quantitative and qualitative methods combined in a mixed method study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. ix). Parents with children at the school were invited to participate in both questionnaire and interview data collection. Similarly, the teachers of religious education in the school were invited to participate in the questionnaire and interview phases of the data collection. The use of these different methods allowed for triangulation and validation.

Social research was chosen as an appropriate approach for the investigation because it allowed for analysis of relationships between groups (Charmaz, 2003; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). Social research also enabled an investigation of a range of factors that may have affected the views of the parents or the teachers. Religious education was best viewed for the purposes of this research as one component of the overall field of education addressed by social research.

### Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

This study drew on an epistemological framework of constructivism. This epistemological approach of constructivism is based on a relativist ontology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) where individuals construct understandings from their experiences within, and relationships with, the

world around them. The constructivist epistemology is contrasted with a positivist one, reflecting a different way of viewing how knowledge and truth are secured and validated. Constructivism is linked to the work of Jean Piaget Fosnet (1994), as it is associated with the way in which understanding of a person's social reality is developed through reflection and experience in an internal processing by the individual, either alone or in relationship with others. Two main concepts can be seen as operating in constructivism: accommodation and assimilation. Assimilation relates to the individual's experiences aligning themselves with pre-existing knowledge. The new experience is integrated comfortably within the older knowledge framework. Accommodation occurs when the new experience challenges the previous framework and requires the individual to alter and reformulate the framework to fit the new experience or understanding of reality.

This approach tends towards a qualitative methodology, methods and analysis (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, this can also include quantitative methods (e.g. questionnaires), particularly where these are concerned with investigating respondents' personal views. Constructivism is concerned with the truth associated with a situation as found through negotiation and dialogue between those who have a common interest in the phenomena (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). The process of developing shared meaning through the dialogue of constructivism was supported by Schwandt (1994). Post-modern assumptions of the ever-changing nature of truth, determined through processes of constructivism, are challenging previously assumed objectivist truths.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective within the general epistemological area of constructivism that is pertinent to the interpretations in this study. Symbolic interactionism proposes that the 'truth' about a given situation can be established through an analysis of the

relationships and interactions within the situation, with the understanding that truths about the situation can be found through examining the ways in which individuals or groups generate their own understanding of their reality:

Social phenomena such as language, decisions, conflicts, and hierarchies exist objectively in the world and exert strong influences over human activities because people construe them in common ways. Things that are believed become real and can be inquired into. (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 4).

Symbolic interactionism is therefore concerned with causal descriptions (Miles and Huberman, 1994) that explain the social processes that lead to particular outcomes and understandings. Symbolic interactionism is an interpretivist perspective that encourages researchers to examine the underlying assumptions that give rise to how individuals and groups interpret experiences and the types of understandings that flow from shared interpretations. Blumer (1986) noted that symbolic interactionism was valuable as a research tool as it allowed an analysis of the tendency of people to act towards situations rather than towards roles or structures. Generally, symbolic interactionism, as seen by Miles and Huberman (1994), is a more ecumenical perspective that allows the researcher to incorporate a variety of approaches to different dimensions of the same event or situation. Symbolic interactionism can be seen as having the capacity to continually redefine the variables under examination and therefore able to accommodate a range of approaches to the same reality (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1994). In this way it is able to co-exist with post-modern approaches (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) with their interpretive foci and flexibility.

#### Review of Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data, as from questionnaires, (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994) is discrete and able to be analysed in numerically adjusted formats. This provides mathematically generated results. Scales such as the Likert scale (Walliman, 2006) can be

used to generate data and this data can then be assigned numeric values for analysis. This allows a range of attitudes and perceptions to be recorded using these instruments for later mathematical analysis. Traditionally, quantitative data was the primary data recognised as being suitable for making statements with high levels of reliability and validity. However, in recent times, there has been an expansion of the range of methods regarded as valid and reliable – and this includes qualitative methods which collect and analyse data sourced through more open-ended processes such as interviews, ethnography, observation and participation in social situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Charmaz, 1994). This methodological approach has grown in acceptance as a legitimate research model, especially when dealing with investigations into complex social interactions. It is the study of natural phenomena in terms of the meanings given to them by the people involved.

Depending on the nature of the data sought in the research, two data collection instruments were considered suitable. Statistical analysis was performed on the quantitative data from the questionnaires (Moser and Kalton, 2003) while word and concept analyses, often referred to as content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990, 2003; Altheide, 1996), were used for analysing the data from the interviews. In the questionnaires, questions were phrased in a closed format that required responses within a given set of options. This allowed each response to be given a numerical value. The numerical values of the responses were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. This included percentages, averages, mean and standard deviations, Pearson's t-test, Fisher's t-test, Fisher's Exact Two Tailed t-test, and Fisher's collapsed 2 x 2 t-test (McDonald, 2008). The results of these analyses provided a statistical overview of the findings of the data. The questionnaires also contained an open-ended question that allowed the respondents to express views which may or may not have fitted within an expected range. These were summarised under key words and phrases.

The semi-structured interview process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Cresswell, 2003) allowed the researcher to explore what the respondents thought about given situations but also allowed them to elaborate on their responses and to provide data relevant to the topic, but from their own perspectives. This encouraged them to give more individualised responses to particular issues arising from the questionnaire data analysis. The qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were summarised using content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). This allowed the researcher to categorise the responses to interviews and open-ended questions in the light of the issues investigated in the questionnaires.

### Mixed-Method Theory

As noted earlier, this study used a mixed methods approach, involving a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Cresswell, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The mixed method study has been defined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998):

These are studies that are a product of the pragmatist paradigm and combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process. (p. 19)

This is a research methodology that is becoming more common. Its empirical data collection combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. While more experimental research tends to draw on a 'positivist' epistemology, this study fits more appropriately within a constructivist, interpretivist framework. Here the mixed methods do not need to draw on two separate knowledge paradigms (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 3). While there is debate about the respective merits of each method, mixed methodologies developed as a practical response to particular research questions (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

The mixed methods approach allowed the findings from one method (questionnaire) to assist in the application of the second method (interview). The questionnaire data were

analysed deductively while the interview data were analysed inductively. This type of mixed methodology was flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt a range of research tools (Cresswell, 2003). In this instance, a sequential mixed method was used (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 15, 18). Cresswell (1998) referred to this as a two-phase study while Miller and Crabtree (1994) labelled it as a sequential design. The process used in this mixed method research has also been referred to as a “Dominant – Less Dominant Design” (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 15). The quantitative data collection, through the questionnaires, was the more dominant method and this was supported by the qualitative data from the interviews.

Through the questionnaires, the mixed methods approach was able to deliver data from parents and teachers within a relatively short time frame. It then enabled a more individualized follow-up process of interviews, which were able to draw out more detailed responses to specific issues that arose from the questionnaires. The initial data collected from parent and teacher questionnaires provided the basis for generalizations about the ways that parents and teachers understood religious education in the school. These generalisations, summarised in themes (Miles and Huberman 1994), were later tested through the interviews. Participants were asked to comment on the main thematic results that emerged from the questionnaire data.

#### Triangulation in the Data Collection

Making use of both interviews and questionnaires, triangulation was addressed in the collection of data (Wiersma, 1991). Two different approaches to data collection helped increase the validity and reliability of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), and, in turn, this enhanced the theoretical or summative conclusions flowing from this data. Reliability (Wiersma, 1991) was also addressed in the survey instruments which were available for repeated use.

## Summary of the Methods Employed in the Research

The range of analytical steps conducted during this research proceeded according to Table 4:1.

*Table 4.1 Process of collection and analysis of data in the research study*

	Aspects of the research methods	Type of methodology	Description of the research phase
1.	Document study	Documentary analysis	Analysis of documents on religious education of the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Ballarat, the school, and current literature on religious education
2.	Questionnaire Data Collection Phase	Quantitative	Parents of Year 7 and 12 students and the religious education teachers of the school were offered questionnaires
3.	Separate summaries of Part A: of the parent questionnaires (PQ) and Part A of the teacher questionnaires (TQ). Combined results from Part B: for both parent and teacher questionnaires	Quantitative	This step provided a general indication of the levels of responses to the questions. It showed, in questions that were common to both questionnaires, where there was an apparent broad agreement or difference in response. It also provided a summary of details particular to each separate group – parents and teachers.
4.	Mean and standard deviation for those questions with numeric response options	Quantitative	The mean and standard deviation showed a general measure of statistical relationship, but the low numbers of teachers (17) compared to the parents (75) made it difficult to claim statistically significant assessments of the figures.
5.	Pearson's and Fisher's Exact Two Tailed	Quantitative	This step involved t-tests and cross-tabulations on the 5 cell options in questions (Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Uncertain (U), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA). Again the low teacher numbers make it difficult to make claims of significance in figures.
6.	Fisher's collapsed 2 x 2 t-test This led to the creation of summary tables of areas of strong agreement and strong disagreement between parents and teachers.	Quantitative	This final t-test was chosen as it collapsed the data into two categories – (SD+D) and (SA+A). This was the statistical test that was most appropriate for looking at agreement or difference between the views of parents and teachers, given the

	The items in Part B and some common Part A items were chosen. [Table 5]		discrepancy between the sizes of the two sets of data. This was a summary of those areas of significant agreement or difference between parents and teachers.
7.	Identification of issues arising from the questionnaires to be pursued in the interviews	Interpretative	In this step, the questions of significance were collated into topics or general areas to be followed up in the subsequent interviews. Other questions were added for further information based on the researcher's interest in the response by parents and / or teachers. The summaries of the data from the questionnaires was collated and discussed in Chapter 4 (parents) and Chapter 5 (teachers).
8.	Interviews	Qualitative	Teachers of religious education were invited to participate in an interview. Parents of Years 7 and 12 students were invited to participate in an interview.
9.	Summary of interviews	Qualitative	The interviews were recorded in tables showing the range of responses to questions and the frequency of similar responses. The tabulated findings were summarised, describing any trends or variations on the topics. There were separate summaries for the interviews of parents (Chapter 4) and teachers (Chapter 5).
10.	Analysis of interviews and questionnaires	Qualitative	The findings were analysed and discussed. The discussion of parent data was done in Chapter 4 and the discussion of teacher data was in Chapter 5. The questionnaire and interview information was discussed in these chapters through comparison of the two sets of responses from questionnaires and interviews. Chapter 6 was used for comparison and discussion of the parent and teacher findings.
11.	Conclusions in relation to	Interpretative	In the light of the findings from the

	research questions		comparison of parent and teacher data, recommendations were made in Chapter 7 for action in the particular Catholic school and for Catholic religious education in general in Australia.
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## Document Study

### *Introduction*

The research involved an examination of a range of documents on religious education that directly or indirectly influenced understanding of the nature and purpose of the religious education. The documents were analysed with specific reference to what they offered in three main areas: the role of teachers of religious education; the role of parents and religious education; and the nature and purpose of religious education as a school curriculum area and within the realm of evangelisation and catechesis as part of the mission of the Church.

The documents were specifically chosen to reflect the developments in religious education since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Prior to the Second Vatican Council religious education methods such as the catechism were covered, but the focus was on those more contemporary documents which may have been more likely to have had a strong influence on the current approaches to religious education.

### *Nature of the Document Study*

The first collection of documents studied were documents of the Roman Catholic Church which pertained directly to the nature and purpose of Catholic religious education. These included documents from the Vatican and Australian Catholic bishops and their educational

agencies. This was followed by an examination of the religious education Guidelines of the Catholic Education Office of the Ballarat Catholic diocese. This documentation was known as *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005). The Bishop of Ballarat mandated this in 2005 to provide the foundation for religious education offered in Catholic primary and secondary schools within the diocese of Ballarat. They were deemed to be in accord with the universal Catholic Church's understanding and expectations of religious education. This *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation provided the school with the basis for its religious education programme.

Thirdly, there was a study of the documents of the school relating to religious education, as they were the means by which the school applied the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) guidelines to classroom religious education curriculum and practices. These documents included the religious education policy of the school, the curriculum overview from Years 7-12, the material provided to parents in relation to religious education and detailed units of work that formed the actual classroom programme. Therefore, the school's documentation was a valuable source of detail, especially if needed to address specific issues raised by parents or teachers.

Finally, the wider literature of religious education was reviewed, with the principal focus on the role of parents in relation to religious education. This included a range of current Catholic and other views on religious education as it applied to the contemporary social and religious situation in Australia and overseas. This also covered some research into parents and religious education, an area with limited research material available. This literature and document analysis has been presented already in the first three chapters of this thesis.

#### Summary of Parents' and Teachers' Numbers in Questionnaires and Interviews

Table 4.2 provides a summary of the numbers of teachers and parents who participated in questionnaire and interview phases of the study.

*Table 4.2 Numbers of respondents to questionnaires and interviews*

Method	Number of respondents
Parent Questionnaires	76
Teacher Questionnaires	17
Parent Interviews	16
Teacher Interviews	14

## Questionnaires

### *Introduction*

The written questionnaire method (Robson, 1993; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, 2005; Wiersma, 1991; Berg, 1989) was used as a means of gathering data from parents and teachers in a relatively short period of time. The questionnaires were directed to two groups: parents of students at Years 7 and 12, and teachers of religious education in the school. Permission was sought and gained from the Principal for administering the questionnaires, and parents were informed of the forthcoming questionnaires through the school newsletters. The parent and teacher questionnaires are shown in Appendix D. The questionnaires used in the research were trialled with a small number of parents and teachers who completed a draft of the questionnaires and then commented on the questionnaires in terms of their ease of understanding, suitability of questions for the purpose, layout, and any other points. The questionnaires were then modified to have groups of questions on similar topics together rather than questions on a similar topic being interspersed throughout the questionnaire. In the final draft, many of the respondents found that the grouping of similarly focussed questions helped them in thinking issues through.

### *Questionnaire Design*

The questionnaires were designed to be self-administered (Robson, 1993). The majority of questions required respondents to select from a five point summated or Likert scale (Robson, 1993; de Vaus, 1990, Moser and Kalton, 2003). This was used because it offered a standardised format that assisted parents and teachers in developing familiarity with the mode of selecting their responses. This increased the likelihood of respondents finding the process easier to complete and to interpret the requirements of questions. The questionnaires were long and this simple and repetitive item type attempted to lessen the strain whilst completing the questions. The scale was:

SD (Strongly disagree) D (Disagree) U (Uncertain) A (Agree) SA (Strongly agree)

An open-ended question was added at the conclusion of the questionnaire to allow respondents to add any further comments that parents or teachers wanted to add in relation to any question or any other matter concerning religious education. Two separate questionnaires were delivered to parents and teachers.

### *Parent Questionnaire*

The questionnaire method involved distributing the questionnaire to parents through the mail. This package to parents included a letter of explanation (Appendix E) inviting parents of students in Years 7 and 12 at the Catholic secondary school to participate as a means of assisting the school in the development of religious education, and in the development of better communication with parents generally. Also included were a return self-addressed envelope and the questionnaire instrument (Appendix D). Preceding this mailing, there was information given to parents about the questionnaire through school newsletters and in other school correspondence to the parents. Each questionnaire had clear and concise directions for

completing the questionnaire, which was anonymous. Following the mail-out, there was a series of reminders in the school newsletters inviting parents to complete the questionnaires or to contact the school for copies if it was lost.

The questionnaire was directed towards the parents of all the 154 Year 7 students to see how these parents understood religious education in the school. All Year 7 parents were invited to participate so as to avoid generating ill-will among those who were not invited, and who subsequently may have questioned why they had been omitted from the process. The same questionnaire was given to the parents of all of the 107 Year 12 students. The majority of these parents had students who had participated in nearly six years of secondary Catholic religious education and who were in a position to have views about religious education in the school. This method of data collection produced 75 parent respondents. There was a relatively even representation of parents of Year 7 and 12. The return of questionnaires was encouraged in the school newsletters which referred to the possible benefits to the school of questionnaire completion.

#### *Teacher Questionnaire*

A further questionnaire (Appendix D) was used to gather data from the teachers of religious education in the school. The questionnaire was given to all religious education teachers because students in Year 12 had experienced a range of religious education teachers over their years at the school. These teachers had an influence on the way that students and their parents experienced the school's religious education programme. The religious education teachers' questionnaire was designed to correlate strongly with the parent questionnaire so that comparisons could be made between the two sets of responses. All 17 religious education teachers voluntarily completed the questionnaire.

### *Format of the Questionnaires*

Each questionnaire had a separate Part A which contained questions primarily related to that particular target group. These questions were designed to provide information about the parents or the teachers as a group, although some questions were in both teacher and parent questionnaires and as such were open to comparison. There was a common Part B, and this allowed direct comparison of responses in this section.

### *Procedures for Analysing the Questionnaire Data*

The questionnaire data were collated and entered into the SPSS analysis package (Norusis, 2008; Argyrous, 2005). The SPSS tools were then used to produce a range of statistical tables, which allowed findings from the data to be compared. The data from the parents and the teachers were kept separate in an initial process of collating raw scores and percentages for each question. This step provided a general indication of the levels of responses to the questions. It provided a summary of the details particular to each separate group – parents and teachers. It showed, in questions that were common to both groups, where there was apparent broad agreement or difference in the responses of the parents and the teachers. The mean and standard deviation were generated for each question with a numerically designated response, and this showed a general measure of statistical relationship, but the low numbers of teachers (17) compared to much larger number of the parents (75) made it difficult to claim any statistically significant correlations. To address this problem with the sizes of the two data groups, further statistical analyses were applied. This involved applying Pearson's and then Fisher's Exact Two Tailed tests. This step involved t-tests and cross-tabulations on the 5 cell options in questions (Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Uncertain (U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA)). Again the low teacher numbers made it difficult to make claims of significance in figures. It was then decided that for ease of obtaining relevant information

from the tables that the five categories for questions would be collapsed to three: Agree, Uncertain, Disagree. Much of the information in the collapsed tables was included in Chapter four about which deals with the parent data, and in Chapter five which deals with the teacher data. The data was then analysed using a Fishers collapsed 2 x 2 t-test which created tables with the two categories of Agree and Disagree. The Fishers test was applied to the data and it generated indications of how the two sets of data correlated. This led to the generation of Tables 7.1 and 7.2 which grouped those responses that were significantly similar (Table 7.1) and those that were significantly different (Table 7.2). The data in these tables were used extensively in the findings chapters, but other data was considered to be educationally significant based not on statistics but on the observation and experience of the researcher.

## Semi-Structured Interviews

### Introduction

The interview method was chosen as a suitable means of data collection for this research because it allowed an opportunity for the interviewer to “harness the daily occurring activity of talk” (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985, p. 7). This process, therefore, could be more natural and engaging for some participants than written questionnaires, and had the potential to allow parents and teachers a more accessible means for responding to enquiries about religious education. The interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2005; Patton, 2002) were conducted with the aim of following up a range of issues raised in the analysis of responses to the questionnaire instruments, and can therefore be qualified as explanatory research (de Vaus, 1990). The interviews were planned as semi-structured interviews (Robson, 1993; Leech, 2002; Berg, 1989), which allowed for an initial basic structure in the interview schedule, but had possibilities for interviewees to add information beyond the specific focus of the set

questions. As the research set out to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, the proposed interview process could be seen to support both the positivist and constructivist goals of the researcher (Silverman, 2005).

As noted earlier, the interviews drew on an interpretivist, symbolic interactionist perspective, in that the interviewer listened to what the parent or teacher expressed in their own words about their perceptions of various dimensions of the religious education program, in light of their own lived experience and personal values. As Brenner, Brown & Canter (1985, p. 3) noted, the interview process allowed “.. both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved.” The role of the researcher was then to take these comments and to analyse their meaning in relation to key indicators about religious education in the school. Because of the specific questions that directed the interviews, they were more akin to Oppenheim’s (1992, p. 66) view of it being a “one-way process” where the researcher directed the proceedings. However, the researcher attempted to follow Bowers (1989) ideal where the researcher has both empathy for the respondent, yet was able to remain sufficiently beyond this to be able to keep an objective perspective. These interviews were used to raise a number of issues surrounding religious education in the school. The qualitative data provided in the interviews was analysed in relation to specific questions or issues. The interview questions (Appendix F) were formulated in response to the questionnaire responses in order to deepen the investigation of a number of key areas raised in responses. These questions were employed in a trial of three parents and a staff member to ascertain that they would be likely to elicit the desired level of response from parents and teachers in the data collection phase of the interviews. The trials provided satisfactory responses in that parents and teachers understood the questions and were able to respond.

### *The Interview Design*

The interviews were designed for one-on-one situations. The respondents were given the opportunity to respond or not to respond to any or all questions. The interviews were recorded using a micro electronic recorder, which was an unobtrusive addition to the setting. These recordings were transferred to a computer and stored. The computer software enabled easy access to various parts of each recording through digital technology. The recordings were transferred to disk storage for backup in case of technical problems with the computer. These recordings were kept safely locked in a drawer in the researcher's office. The researcher was the only person who had access to these recordings on computer or disk. Interview numbers were the only means used to identify the recordings, with no personal details such as the name of the interviewee attached. This was to honour the agreement with the interviewee of anonymity and confidentiality. These records of interviews were recorded and maintained according to the policy of Australian Catholic University in regard to privacy and storage.

The interview questions, like those in the questionnaires, were developed in the light of the findings in the literature review. In addition, the interviews aimed to elicit further data from the two groups about religious education based on previous responses to the questionnaires, thus the interviews allowed participants to comment on some of the broad findings from the questionnaires. Parents chose to participate in interviews in response to letters of invitation sent to all Year 7 and 12 parents. Interested parents contacted the researcher who followed these up with a phone call interview or a personal interview in a venue approved by the respondents. When it eventuated that there were fewer respondents than desired, the researcher made personal contact through phone calls with selected parents to invite them to participate in the interviews. The interviews followed after the data from the questionnaires had been analysed. The interviews were used to investigate the "Why?" behind the responses to the questionnaires, so in this sense, they were not a repeat of the questionnaire

questions. Teachers were invited to participate in the interviews through intra-school email. All teachers who accepted the opportunity to participate were interviewed.

The initial goal of completing parent interviews involving 8 parents at each of Years 7 and 12 was successfully achieved. The teacher interviews aimed to include at least 2 teachers of religious education at each of (i) Years 7, (ii) VCE, and (iii) the other religious education teachers on staff, and this was also successfully achieved.

The interview responses were coded for analysis to ensure consistency of recording and interpretation (Canter, Brown, and Groat, 1985; Robson, 1993; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; de Vaus, 1990). The recordings of the interviews were reviewed and as new aspects were mentioned they were added to the analysis grid. This analysis of the interviews was done through the following steps. The oral responses were converted into a series of written summary points accurately recording the actual wording of the interviewee. There were often a number of summary points for each interview question. These were recorded by hand in a notebook so that the entire interview was recorded by question number and summary points for each interviewee. The interviewee was coded by number, both on the computer file of the interview and on the summary record. The same process was used for parent and teacher interviews.

The next phase of the analysis was examining the summary points for common categories within the responses to each question. This was undertaken at the conclusion of the recorded interviews, when all summary notes had been recorded. Responses with similar concepts were grouped together and tables were generated to record the frequency of particular categories offered by the interviewees. This was done for each question in the interview. Some questions had many different categories while other questions had a limited number of categories. During the creation of the frequency tables, all the categories in the first interview were listed by question and then, as the summary points for each new interview were added,

either repeated categories were tallied or new categories were recorded for that question. In this way, a table was constructed to show the frequency of different responses. At the conclusion of the interviews, a summary of the comments was made and examined in relation to the findings of the questionnaires.

### *Considerations with Regard to Interviews*

Interviews can be a rich source of information that is difficult to collect using other data collection tools. However, there were some inherent possible limitations in the interview process. As Patton (2002) asserted, the role of the interviewer is paramount to the success or weakness of the interview process. It was the interviewer who had control of how the participant was encouraged to share information. This included setting initial ground rules for participation through to the phrasing of questions for response. It also covered the type of feedback and encouragement given to interviewees as they responded. In this research, the interviewer was responsible for the direction of the interview, controlled the time given to particular questions, and decided whether to follow up responses with further prompts or questions for greater detail or elaboration. The interviewer is continually involved in the process of making decisions. It is the nature of these decisions that direct the interview and therefore the responses. The interviewer therefore needed to remain focussed on the purposes of the interview, which were guided by the research questions and by the questions prepared after analysis of the questionnaire data. It was also guided by an appreciation of the role of the interviewer as guide and not a manipulator of responses. Kvale (1996, p. 34) pointed out that the interviewer “leads the subject towards certain themes but not to certain opinions about these themes”. The interviewer must be aware of the possibility of bias or of limiting free responses to questions or topics.

Similarly, there were strengths in the interview process, which are not present in some other research methods. There was an opportunity for “implicit or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation which is not so central and often not present in other research procedures” (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985, p. 3). Clarification could thus be more readily achieved. There was also the immediacy of response in interviews. The material was available in a more immediate time frame, for example, than the questionnaires in this research which were subjected to being posted and returned at the will of the respondent.

The interview data were coded using the same theoretical scheme to ensure that each interview was treated and responses interpreted in a similar manner. The same researcher conducted all the interviews in an attempt to secure consistency in process. The interviewer closely monitored factors such as body language, consistency in questions asked and feedback comments. Each interview was reviewed soon after recording and note was taken of any movement by the interviewer from the desired approach during the interview.

### Content Analysis

The interviews, which were designed to further investigate the reasoning behind particular findings from the parent and teacher questionnaires, were similar for both groups so as to enable comparison of the responses from the parents and the teachers. The interviews conducted with parents and teachers were analysed and recorded according to the following process which is framed within a content analysis approach. Content analysis, (Mayring, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990, 2003, Altheide, 1996) with reference to conceptual analysis, refers to the process of examining text, in this case, interviews transcripts, and noting the presence of particular concepts and their frequency. Content analysis has a secondary form known as relational analysis. In this textual analysis

situation (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Mason, 2002), content analysis allowed the researcher to examine the relationships between particular concepts raised in the interviews and to then allow the researcher to develop categories within which similar responses were grouped.

Content analysis was chosen as the preferred method for analysis of the qualitative data as it deals with the actual text of the interviews and explores the nature of the communication (Silverman, 2005; Weber, 2003) developed with the parents and teachers. Content analysis, as applied to this study, maintained the integrity of the initial data form as it grouped these data into common categories that were then compared and analysed. The technique allowed grouping of data from persons who had a variety of linguistic skills. Content analysis was chosen despite the process being time consuming and difficult to automate or computerise (Colorado State University, 2008). The method has been criticised for the lack of attention to the context that produced the text. There has also been concern that inferences may be made too liberally about the “relationships and impacts implied within the study” (Colorado State University, 2008). In this thesis, the context was described in detail in Chapter 2 and served as reference point for the analysis. The inferences were made with respect to the actual data, not to preconceived expectations or generalisations that could not be grounded in the data.

Table 4.3 shows the sequence of steps that were undertaken in the content analysis of the interviews in this study. It shows the 4 year period from the commencement of the document study in 2005, through the data collection and analysis phases, leading to the discussion of the findings and the formulation of recommendations related to the findings.

*Table 4.3 Timeline for the phases of the research study*

Date	Action
2005 - 2008	Document Study and Literature Review
March 2006 – April 2006	Distribution and collection of questionnaires for parents and teachers
April 2006 – October 2006	Analysis of questionnaire data
November 2006 – March 2007	Interviews with teachers
April 2007 – July 2007	Content analysis of interviews with teachers
May 2007 – September 2007	Interviews conducted with parents
September 2007 – January 2008	Content analysis of interviews with teachers
February 2008 – June 2008	Completion of drafts of data summaries, data analyses and context chapters
June 2008 – January 2009	Completion of discussion chapters and recommendations.

#### Summary of the Chapter

The analysis of the findings of the data collected from parents through the questionnaires and interviews is to be found in Chapter four, and the summaries of the data collected from teachers is collated and discussed in Chapter five. The findings of the analyses of the interviews were integrated with the findings of the questionnaires to construct a detailed summary of the perceptions of parents and teachers in relation to various aspects surrounding religious education in the school.

Therefore, this chapter has presented an overview of the processes used for the collection and analysis of data relevant to the research study. It has shown an overview of the methods employed within the mixed-methods approach, providing details of the document study, questionnaire and interview data collections. This chapter has developed a description of the analysis of the data and has set the investigative framework for the following summary and discussion chapters of the research. Chapter five presents the

responses of parents to questionnaires and interviews. Chapter six reports the findings from the questionnaires and interviews for teachers. Chapter seven discusses the meaning and significance of the results reported in the previous two chapters. In particular, it comments on comparisons and contrasts between the responses of teachers and parents. Chapter eight draws conclusions for religious education in the light of the whole study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE DATA FROM THE PARENTS

### Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected through questionnaires and interviews with parents of Years 7 and 12 students according to the process outlined in the research design. The data from the parent responses to the questionnaires were examined and from this examination a number of questions and issues were identified which became the focus of the interviews. The data collected from the questionnaires showed that there were areas where there was agreement about religious education. This agreement included the areas of content, process and the spiritual significance of religious education for their children. However, there were also areas where a number of the parents had differing expectations about particular aspects of religious education.

This chapter first presents a summary of the parents' responses to the questionnaire. The data in all tables of the questionnaire section are expressed as percentages of the total questionnaire responses for that question. Following this, there is a tabulated summary of responses to the interviews.

### Summary of Responses to Parent Questionnaires

#### *Demographic Data*

Table 5.1 presents data about the parents in terms of gender, religious identification, participation in religious communities, age and personal experience of Catholic education and the year level of their children.

*Table 5.1 Parent demographic data*

Item number	Topic	%	%	%			
PQ1	Level of students	Year 7 53	Year 12 42	Both 5			
PQ2	Sex of parent	Male 7	Female 79	Both 14			
PQ3	Same family religion	Yes 63	No 37				
PQ4	Religion in family	Catholic  38	Catholic & Other Christian 23	Catholic & No religion 12	Other Christian 19	Non-Christian 1	No Religion 5
PQ5	Parish participation <sup>5</sup>	Week 22	Month 8	Occasional 30	Rarely 25	Never 14	
PQ6	Age of parent	<35 years 4	35-45 years 49	45+ years 47			
PQ7	Catholic primary school - parents	Male only 32	Female only 18	Both 11			
PQ8	Catholic secondary school - parents	Male only 13	Female only 33	Both 8			
PQ9	Positive memories of Catholic religious education	Disagree 6	Uncertain 10	Agree 84			
B58	Completing the questionnaire was helpful for parents	Disagree 4	Uncertain 14	Agree 83			

<sup>5</sup> This figure of 30% regular attendance at parish religious services is not to be confused with the National Church Life Survey finding that the average Catholic attendance in Australia to be closer to 18%. The parents who responded to this research were not all Catholic. Seventy-three percent of families had at least one Catholic parent. Overall, the respondents referred to their own practice of religion whether Catholic, other Christian or other faith, hence the discrepancy with the National Life Church Life Survey.

There were 76 questionnaires returned by the parents of whom 40 had children at Year 7, 32 had Year 12 children and four had children at both levels. The 76 families who returned questionnaires represented 29% of the target population of the Year 7 and 12 parents. Eleven of the questionnaires were completed by two parents of the same family. Of the remaining questionnaires, 60 were completed by females alone and the remaining five by males. Four percent of the parents were aged less than 35, 49% were aged between 35 and 45, and the remaining 47% were aged over 45 years. Generally, about half the respondents had children in Year 7 and the other half in Year 12, with most questionnaires completed by females.

The data from the questionnaires indicated that in 63% of the families, all family members were of the same religion. Of the families who completed the questionnaires, 73% had at least one member who was Catholic. This included 38% of families who were all Catholics, 23% who had members of Catholic and other religious traditions, 12% who had Catholic and 'no religion', 19% of families who had a member from another Christian tradition, 1% of families belonged to a non-Christian faith, and 5% claimed to have 'no religion'. The data indicated that 22% of the participating parents attended religious services weekly, 8% attended monthly, 30% were occasional attendees, 25% rarely attended services and 14% claimed to never attend religious services. Therefore, the data showed that 60% of the parent population who completed the questionnaires had at least an occasional link with the Catholic Church.

The data indicated that in 11% of the families who completed the questionnaires, both of the parents in the family had attended Catholic primary schools. Among the remaining families, 32% had males only who attended Catholic primary schools and in 18% of the families only the females had attended a Catholic primary school. In all, 39%

of the families did not have a parent who had attended a Catholic primary school. Among the families who replied, 8% had both parents who had attended Catholic secondary schools. Of the other families, 13% had male parents only and 33% had female parents only who had attended a Catholic secondary school. In all, more than half of the parents who completed the questionnaires had some experience of Catholic education while growing up. Of those parents who completed the questionnaires and who had attended Catholic schools, the data showed that 84% of them had positive memories of the religious education that they had received. Those parents who did not have positive memories comprised 6% of the group of parent respondents who had received some Catholic education. Overall, therefore, the parents who responded to the questionnaire had completed some Catholic education themselves and their experience of religious education was generally a positive one. A majority of the parents (83%) agreed that completing the questionnaire had been useful in helping them to think about the nature and purpose of religious education. A small minority (4%) disagreed that completing the questionnaire had been helpful for them.

In summary, the data on demographics showed that about half the respondents had children in Year 7 and the other half in Year 12 with most questionnaires completed by females. The data indicated that the population who completed the questionnaires had a link with the Catholic Church and that the parents who responded to the questionnaire had completed some Catholic education themselves, with positive experiences of religious education. The majority of the parents agreed that completing the questionnaire had been a helpful exercise.

*Parent Involvement with the School and Religious Education*

Table 5.2 presents the parents' opinions about a number of aspects related to their engagement with the religious education curriculum.

*Table 5.2 Parent engagement with religious education*

		Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
PQ10	Parents value RE	2	14	84
PQ11	Parent good knowledge of RE	17	34	49
PQ12	Parent know little of RE in school	50	20	29
PQ13	Difficult to know how to involve parents in RE	27	25	48
PQ14	More opportunities needed for parent involvement in RE	20	39	42
PQ15	RE P/T interviews needed as much as other subjects	35	15	51
PQ16	RE discussed at home often	42	11	48
PQ17	RE mail out to Parents	12	30	58
PQ18	Detailed RE at parent night	23	37	40
PQ19	Yr level semester parent meetings for RE	46	36	19
PQ20	Newsletter should have RE updates	8	24	69
PQ21	School website access for RE curriculum	9	17	74
PQ22	Parents could be involved in planning RE	24	60	16
PQ23	Parent should have access to texts	12	51	37
PQ28	Parent happy about what they know of RE at school	13	21	66
PQ30	RE was an important part of the choice of this school	19	11	70
PQ32	Help to understand RE - catechesis	65	7	28
PQ33	Help to understand RE - evangelisation	63	13	23
PQ34	Help to understand RE - witnessing	56	13	31
PQ35	Help to understand RE - inculturation	78	9	13
PQ36	Help to understand RE - ministry	41	18	41
PQ37	Help to understand RE - mission	39	21	41
PQ38	Terms confusing for parents	12	11	77

In general, the parents who completed the questionnaires valued religious education in the school. This was supported by a majority of 84% of the parents, with only 2% of the parents openly disagreeing with this. Approximately half the parents (49%) agreed that parents, generally, had “good” knowledge of religious education in the school, although approximately one third (34%) of the parents were uncertain whether parents did

or did not have “good” knowledge of religious education. The data provided by question 12 of the parent questionnaire indicated that 50% of the parents did not agree that the wider parent population of the school had little knowledge of religious education. According to the data from question 28, 66% of the parents were happy with what they knew of religious education in the school, while 13% of them were not happy with their current knowledge. When asked whether the fact that the school offered religious education was important in the decision to send their child to the school, a majority (70%) of the parents agreed that it was important.

Despite this valuing of religious education, half of the parents said that they did not know how to become involved with it. The data showed that half of the parents agreed with the proposition that it was difficult to know how to involve most parents in religious education, while another 25% of them were uncertain. On the issue of whether there was a need for more opportunities for the parents to become involved in religious education, the parents were quite divided with 20% disagreeing with the need for more opportunities. Another 42% agreed with the need for improved opportunities for engagement while a further 39% were uncertain. When asked whether the parents could be involved in religious education planning with the teacher, 16% of the respondents agreed, leaving 24% of the parents in disagreement and the remaining 60% of the parents were uncertain.

Half of the parents who completed the questionnaires (51%) agreed that parents should attend religious education parent-teacher interviews to the same extent as they would attend them for other subjects in the curriculum. Another 35% of the parents disagreed with this and a small minority of 15% were uncertain. When asked if a document which summarised the religious education curriculum for parents would be beneficial, 58% of the parents agreed, with 12% disagreed. When asked if a detailed presentation of the religious education curriculum at a parent- teacher evening would be

helpful, 40% of the respondents agreed, leaving 60% who did not think it would be of benefit or who were uncertain. A minority of the parents (19%) agreed that year level meetings for parents each semester to explain religious education matters would be helpful. Of the remaining parents, 46% disagreed on the value of these meetings and the remaining 36% were uncertain. A majority of the parents (69%) agreed that the school newsletter should have regular items on the religious education curriculum at each year level within the school. Only 8% of the parents disagreed with this suggestion. In regard to whether the religious education curriculum should be easily accessible to all parents on the school website, the majority of the parents (74%) agreed that this would be helpful or very helpful. In relation to whether the parents would find it helpful to examine the text books used within the religious education curriculum, about half of those who responded were uncertain, with 37% believing that it would be helpful.

The data indicated that the use of theoretical and/or theological language to communicate with parents about religious education was not helpful for these parents. The parents were asked to rate how helpful to their understanding of the purposes of religious education they found particular terms. These terms were ‘catechesis’, ‘evangelisation’, ‘witnessing’, ‘inculturation’, ‘ministry’, and ‘mission’. The majority of the parents (77%) responded that they found these terms generally confusing. Individually, the terms varied in their perceived helpfulness with ‘catechesis’ being helpful for 28% of the parents, ‘evangelisation’ for 23% of them, ‘witnessing’ for 31% of them, ‘inculturation’ for 13% of them, ‘ministry’ for 41% of them, and ‘mission’ for 41% of the parents who completed the questionnaires.

In summary, the data showed that the parents valued religious education even if this support was not always made obvious to the school. Parents valued communication with the school and preferred this to be in newsletters, both hardcopy and electronic, and

they supported curriculum information being made available on the school website. A majority of the parents preferred electronic contact with school to personal contact through meetings.

### *Content*

Table 5.3 presents data on a range of issues associated with the content of the religious education curriculum. It also provides data on the awareness of parents of the contemporary approaches to teaching religious education in the school. All the questions here were in Part B of the questionnaire, a section also used with the teachers.

*Table 5.3 Parents' views about content of religious education*

		Disagree %	Uncertain %	Agree %
B1	RE compulsory 7-10	11	11	78
B2	RE optional 11-12	22	5	74
B6	Students need detailed knowledge of Catholic faith	12	17	71
B7	Discussion of personal understanding of teachings	1	4	94
B8	Discuss relevance of Church today	1	7	92
B9	History of Christianity and Catholic Church is important	5	7	88
B10	Express feelings about issues	0	1	99
B11	Students should be encouraged to memorise Catholic doctrine and moral codes	45	31	24
B12	RE should teach about moral values	6	16	77
B13	RE should teach about right and wrong from the Catholic view	5	76	19
B14	Teaching about Jesus and his role in salvation	3	16	81
B16	RE - Community service	1	8	90
B17	RE – social justice issues	1	8	91
B20	RE – other Christian religious traditions	14	4	82
B21	RE – non-Christian religious traditions	9	11	80
B22	Study of other religions – greater acceptance of other religious traditions	3	15	83
B23	Study of other religions – leads to better appreciation of own tradition	4	16	80
B28	RE – stories of Bible heroes	4	7	90
B29	RE – knowledge of Jesus and his teachings from the Bible	1	8	91
B30	Interpret Bible in light of modern Bible scholarship	7	26	67
B31	Yr 7 – Bible for all students	7	16	77
B32	RE Textbooks will inform parents	12	22	66
B49	Know about SCP	60	29	11

B50	Know about <i>Awakenings</i>	59	25	16
B51	RE – encourage critical thinking about religion and religious issues	1	7	92
B52	RE – critically evaluate contemporary spiritual and moral issues	0	8	92
B53	Show +ve and –ve influences of religion on lives	1	3	96
B54	Awareness of cults, sects, and fundamentalism	4	15	81
B55	Knowledge of religious conflicts and persecutions in the world today	4	11	85
B56	Evaluate the +ve and –ve impact of religion on society	1	1	97
B57	RE – awareness of cultural influences on values and behaviour	0	3	97

The data from the questionnaires showed that a majority (78%) of those parents who returned the questionnaires agreed that religious education should be compulsory for all students in Years 7 to 10 at the school. There was a different response to the issue of optional Years 11 and 12 religious education, with 74% of the parents disagreeing with compulsory religious education at these levels.

Of the parents who responded, 71% agreed that their children should have detailed knowledge of the teachings and practice of the Catholic faith by the end of their education at the school. Twelve percent of the parent responses disagreed with this expectation. The data showed that almost all of the parents (94%) wanted their children to be able to discuss their own understanding and reactions to teachings of the Catholic Church. Similarly, 92% of the respondents supported their children being able to discuss the place and relevance of the Church in society today. Also, a large proportion (88%) of parent respondents agreed that the history of Christianity and the Catholic Church was important within the religious education curriculum.

The data from the questionnaires indicated that over 90% of these parents agreed that religious education should help their children to think critically about religion and religious issues. Similarly, 92% of the parents who responded agreed that religious education should also help their children to critically evaluate contemporary spiritual and

moral issues. In addition, nearly all of the parents (96%) also agreed that their children should be able to see the positive and negative influences that religion can have on people's lives. Aligned with this, 97% of the parents agreed that their children should be able to evaluate the positive and negative impacts of religion on society. A majority of the parent responses (81%) were in agreement that their children should become aware of the issues surrounding fundamentalism, cults and sects in society today. Again, the majority of parents (85%) supported their children being given the opportunity to learn about religious persecutions and conflicts in the world today and in history while almost all (97%) of the parents believed that religious education should help their children to become more aware of the cultural influences on people's values and behaviours.

The data highlighted that 81% of the responding parents agreed that religious education should include teachings about Jesus and his role in salvation with a small minority of 3% disagreeing. When asked if their children should have knowledge of Jesus and his teachings from the Bible, 91% of parents agreed, with similar support for their children being taught about biblical heroes in religious education. In response to a question related to whether their children should learn how to interpret the Bible in light of modern biblical scholarship, a majority of the parents (67%) agreed that this was desirable. About a quarter of the parents were uncertain about teaching the use of modern biblical scholarship, with 7% disagreeing with its use. A majority of the parents (77%) supported their children receiving a Bible at the commencement of Year 7 and few (7%) disagreed with this practice. Two-thirds of the parents believed that when the religious education text book was taken home that it could inform parents about Catholicism. Again, almost all of these parents (99%) agreed that religious education should provide opportunities for their children to express their feelings and / or opinions about issues.

The data from the questionnaires showed that a minority of the parents (11%) believed that they were well informed about the current religious educational approach of SCP (Groome, 1980) which is emphasised in the diocesan guidelines. The majority of the parents (60%) acknowledged knowing little about this approach. Similarly, 59% of the parents responded that they were not well informed about the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum used at the school, while another 16% of the parents believed that they did have a good knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum.

A substantial percentage, 90%, of the parents who completed the questionnaires agreed that their children should have some experience of community service in religious education. A similar response (91%) was returned when the question was asked as to whether religious education should address social justice issues with their children.

The questionnaire data showed that 82% of the parents agreed with their children having the opportunity to learn about Christian denominations other than Catholicism, with 14% disagreeing with this position. A majority of the parents (80%) agreed that their children should have the opportunity to learn about non-Christian religious traditions. Similar numbers (83%) of the parents agreed that the study of other religions could help their children to become more accepting of other religious traditions. Eighty percent of the parents also agreed that a study of other religions could help their children to better appreciate their own religion.

In summary, the data indicated that a majority of those parents who returned the questionnaires supported compulsory religious education at Years 7 -10 but advocated optional religious education in Years 11 and 12. The parents' data supported detailed teaching of the beliefs of the Catholic Church and showed that they expected community service and social justice to be prominent. The data also showed support for religious education offering scripture study and opportunities for their children to express their

opinions on current issues relevant to them. The parents acknowledged limited awareness of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and SCP, and they expected that their children would learn about a range of religions.

*Sacraments, Liturgy, Prayer, Witness*

Table 5.4 presents a summary of the responses of the parents to issues associated with the liturgical and prayer activities of the College. It also deals with the expectations of the parents that the religious education teachers be witnesses to the Catholic faith.

*Table 5.4 Parents' views on sacraments, liturgy, prayer and the Christian witness of teachers*

		Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
PQ24	Parents have unrealistic expectations of RE	44	41	15
PQ25	Teachers have unrealistic expectations of RE	33	47	20
PQ26	Parents expect RE to increase Mass attendance	84	9	6
PQ27	RE Trs expect RE to increase Mass attendance	41	49	10
PQ29	School only way child experiences Catholic Church	51	7	42
PQ31	RE Tr should be a witness to the Catholic faith	22	18	59
B3	Compulsory Mass and prayer - classes	11	16	74
B4	Compulsory Mass and prayer – school	15	11	75
B5	Non-Catholics optional Mass attendance	64	12	24
B15	RE - increase commitment to religious tradition	23	37	40
B18	RE – promote involvement in parish	16	19	65
B19	Student mass attendance depends on more than RE	37	13	49
B24	RE – offer Mass, sacraments of Catholic Church	5	23	71
B25	RE – meditation experience	10	32	58
B26	RE – different types of prayer practices	5	22	73
B27	RE – traditional prayers of the Christian tradition	3	29	68

The questionnaire data showed that a minority of the parents (10%) agreed that teachers expect religious education to increase attendance at parish Masses and about half (49%) of the parents were not sure. A majority of the parents (84%) who responded agreed that parents, generally, did not expect religious education to increase the Mass attendance of their children. The responses showed that over 20% or less of the parents believed that teachers or parents had unrealistic expectations of religious education. The parents' responses were divided as to whether the school was the only experience of the Catholic Church for their children, with half disagreeing and 42% agreeing that it was the only experience. The parents confirmed that both Masses and prayer services conducted as a class activity (74%) and as a whole school (75%) should be compulsory. A majority of 71% of the parents agreed that religious education should provide opportunities for their children to participate in the sacraments of the Catholic Church – Reconciliation and Eucharist – with only 5% of the responding parents disagreeing.

The parent data were divided on the ability of religious education to make their children more committed to their religious tradition, with 23% of the parents disagreeing, 40% of them agreeing and 37% of them uncertain. The majority (65%) of the parents agreed that one of the main aims of religious education was to promote the involvement of their children in the local parishes, while a minority of 16% disagreed.

The data showed that approximately half of the parents believed that Mass attendance on Sunday was influenced by more than just religious education classes, but another 37% of the parents' responses indicated that the classroom religious education was influential in whether the student attended Mass or not. When asked if students who were non-Catholic should have the option of not attending Mass, 64% of the parents disagreed and 24% of them thought that they should have the option not to attend.

A slight majority (58%) of the parents who completed the questionnaires agreed that their children should have the experience of meditation in religious education classes and one-third were uncertain. Religious education should give their children the experience of different types of prayer practices according to 73% of the parents' responses. The parents' data indicated that their children should learn traditional prayers of the Christian tradition (68%), with only 3% of the participating parents disagreeing.

The data from the parent questionnaires indicated that a majority of the parents (59%) expected that the teachers of religious education would be witnesses to the Catholic faith. Approximately 20% of the responding parents did not have this expectation and similar numbers were unsure of this as an expectation.

In summary, few of the parents who completed questionnaires believed that both parents and teachers had unreasonable expectations of religious education. Few, 6%, of parents expected religious education to increase parish Mass attendance; although 65% responded that religious education should promote parish involvement. A majority of these parents supported their children learning about meditation, and a range of prayer styles including traditional Christian prayers. Teachers were expected to be witnesses to the Catholic faith by 59% of the parents.

#### *Status of Religious Education as an Academic Subject*

Table 5.5 presents data from the parent questionnaires relating to how parents perceived the academic status of the religious education curriculum, including units from the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) curriculum. The VCE is the educational curriculum for all secondary schools in Victoria offering Years 11 and 12 studies. The

school teaches units from the VCE Study Design for ‘Religion and Society’. Units 1 and 2 are available at Year 11 and Units 3 and 4 are available at Years 11 and 12 levels<sup>6</sup>.

*Table 5.5 Parental views on the academic nature of the religious education curriculum*

		Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
B33	RE – assessment like other subjects	23	22	55
B34	Test students on knowledge of Catholic – Christian faith	32	27	40
B35	RE – academically challenging as other subjects	31	23	46
B36	RE – homework	32	26	42
B37	Parents should be involved in RE homework	23	38	39
B38	VCE RE in 10-12 increases academic status of RE	19	39	42
B39	Yr 11-12 should study at least 1 VCE RE subject	47	19	34
B40	11-12 should have a more Catholic subject included	26	56	18
B41	RE status is low in student opinion	3	22	76
B42	RE status is low in parent opinion	26	35	39

The data from the parents’ questionnaires indicated that about half of the parents who completed the questionnaires agreed that religious education should have assessment tasks like every other subject. The other half of the parents was evenly divided between disagreement and uncertainty. On the question of whether their children should be tested on their knowledge of the Catholic-Christian faith, the parent responses were quite varied with 40% agreeing with tests, 32% disagreeing and 27% uncertain. Similar data were recorded for the statement that religious education should be as academically challenging as other subjects. In that data, 46% of the parents agreed that religious education should be as academically challenging, while 31% disagreed. The parent responses were divided, with 42% agreeing and 32% disagreeing with the suggestion that religious education

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<sup>6</sup> Units 3 and 4 of the VCE form part of the studies that contribute towards the students’ Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) which is determined from the results in the students’ units 3 and 4 subjects. The ENTER is used to determine student entrance into universities and tertiary study institutions.

should have homework. The parent responses were also quite divided about whether the parents should become more involved in their children's religious education homework. The data showed that 39% of the respondents agreed that parents generally should become involved in the religious education homework, with an equal number uncertain and 22% disagreeing with parental involvement in religious education homework.

When the parents were questioned about whether the academic status of religious education was raised by having a VCE subject in Years 10, 11 and 12, 42% of them agreed that it did raise the academic status of religious education, but another 39% were uncertain. In relation to their children studying at least one VCE religious education unit at Years 11 and 12, 34% of the responding parents agreed and 47% disagreed. A majority of the parents (56%) were uncertain whether the school should offer a 'more Catholic' unit than those currently offered in the senior years, while 18% of the parents agreed with the 'more Catholic' option. Three-quarters of the parents agreed that the status of religious education was generally low in the opinion of their children. There were only 3% of the participating parents who disagreed with this. When the parents were asked about the status of religious education among parents generally, the response was more even with 39% of the responses agreeing that parents hold religious education in low regard, 26% disagreed with this estimation of regard and 35% of the parents who were uncertain as to how parents regard religious education.

In general, the parents were divided about the academic nature of religious education and the assessment required for the subject. They were also divided about the benefits of a VCE religious education unit, and 76% agreed that their children held religious education in low regard against other subjects. The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaires did not believe that parents held religious education in high regard academically.

*Religious Education, Personal Faith and the Search for Meaning*

The data provided in Table 5.6 is a summary of the parent responses to statements about the role of religious education in the development of their children’s spirituality and faith, and in the search for meaning in the life of these young people.

*Table 5.6 Parents’ views on the relationship between religious education and the development of personal faith and the students’ search for meaning in life*

		Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
B43	RE – think about meaning and purpose in life	0	4	96
B44	RE- use Catholic tradition to construct personal meaning	6	12	81
B45	RE – enhance spirituality without reference to local parish involvement	0	11	89
B46	RE – help develop spirituality of students	3	9	88
B47	RE – help develop personal faith	0	11	89
B48	Familiar with Catholic tradition – for personal faith later in life	11	20	69

The data provided in Table 5.6 showed that almost all of the parents (96%) agreed that religious education should help their children to think about the meaning and purpose of their lives. No parents disagreed. A majority of the parents (81%) agreed that the religious education curriculum should help their children to draw on the Catholic tradition in constructing their own personal meaning in life. None of the parents disagreed with this claim, and 89% agreed with the statement that the religious education curriculum should enhance the spirituality of their children whether or not these young people became active members of a local religious community. The parents provided similar responses to the statement that religious education should help to develop the spirituality of their children, with 88% agreeing on this anticipated outcome. For the statement that religious education should help their children to develop their personal faith, 89% of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed with this proposition, with none of the parents

disagreeing. The final statement in this section related to students becoming familiar with the Catholic tradition in order that they might develop a personal Christian faith later in life. In response to this statement, 69% of parents agreed that their children might benefit later in life, 11% disagreed and the remaining 20% were uncertain if religious education would contribute to the development of Christian faith later in life.

### *Conclusion*

Over 90% of the questionnaires were completed by females and the data showed that the parents who responded had some connection with the Catholic Church, with over half of the parents having had some form of Catholic primary and/or secondary education. Of these parents, 84% indicated that they valued religious education without necessarily demonstrating this in an obvious manner, and approximately 70% of the parents' preferred electronic contact with school through emails, newsletters and the school website. The data showed that 78% of the parents surveyed supported compulsory religious education in Years 7-10, but 74% preferred it to be optional at Years 11 and 12. The religious education curriculum was expected to offer prominence to community service, social justice, scripture study and to the opportunity for their children to openly share their views on religious matters.

The parents' data showed that they had little knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and SCP aspects of the curriculum. The parents, generally, believed that they had realistic expectations of the religious education curriculum, and 73% supported a range of prayer experiences for their children. About 60% of parents expected the teachers to be witnesses to the Catholic faith. The data showed that less than half of the parents indicated that religious education was of equal academic value to other subjects. Seventy-six percent of the parents believed that the students saw religious education as having low

academic status, while 35% were uncertain about how parents viewed the status of the subject, with another 39% agreeing that parents value it as low status. Half of the parents agreed that religious education was academically challenging and similar numbers believed that methods of assessment for religious education should be similar to those for other subjects. Approximately one third of parents were unsure about the benefits of a VCE religious education unit.

## The Interviews

### *Introduction*

The interviews with the parents were conducted with those parents who accepted an invitation given through a letter to the parents of all Year 7 and 12 students. Low numbers responded to the letter so a number of parents were invited through phone calls to participate in the interviews. These were parents who had children in either Year 7 or Year 12 with both males and females contacted. The parents were from active Catholic and other groups within the school parent population. The interviews were recorded as voice files which then enabled repeated playback and easy stop and search functions when downloaded onto a computer. The interviews were converted from voice file to summary notes which were then placed in tables by extracting themes within the interview summaries. These tables became frequency tables as themes were recognised as common within interview summaries and multiple occurrences of the themes were recorded. Therefore, the interviews were analysed using content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990, 2003, Altheide, 1996).

### *Profile of the Parents*

Table 5.7 provides a summary of the profile of the parents who participated in the interviews including information about the year levels of their children, the gender of the parents, whether of not the parents had particular interest in religious education, whether or not the parents were active in local Church communities and suggested reasons as to why few questionnaires were completed by males.

*Table 5.7 Characteristics of the parents who were interviewed*

Student level	Yr 12 (14) Yr 7 (7)
Gender of parents	Male (8) Female (9)
Special Interest in RE	Yes (12) No (4)
Active Church	Yes (7) No (9)
Low numbers of males completing the questionnaires	Females do the educational admin(15); No surprise with low male numbers (14); Male support is passive (10); Males may have no religion involvement (6); Females are the nurturers (6); Traditional roles in families (6); Males unaware of questionnaire (5); Males too busy at work (5); Males feel that it is not their role (4); Males have no interest (3); Females choose the school (2); Males find questionnaire confronting (1); Surprising finding (1)

The majority of parents who were interviewed had children in Year 12 and about half had children in Year 7, while among those who responded to the questionnaires, it was more even with 53% of families having a Year 7 child and 42% of families having a Year 12 child. In addition about 31% of parents who took part in the interviews had children at both year levels compared with 5% of those completing questionnaires. Among the interviewees, there were almost equal numbers of males and females, but among the parents who completed the questionnaires, there was a small minority of male participants. Both parents in a family completed 11(16%) of the questionnaires but only one (6%) of the interviews was completed with both parents. In view of the fact that the interviewees were volunteers, it was not surprising that 12 of the 16 had a special interest in religious education and that just less than half were active members of religious communities. This

compared with the 30% of those who responded to the questionnaires who were active Church members. The interviewees as a group were positively inclined towards religion and religious education, and this fact was considered as the analysis was conducted. By the end of the chapter, this is balanced to give a more holistic picture by examination of the findings from the questionnaires in which the data showed a greater range of religious practice and commitment.

The interviewees were asked to offer suggestions as to why so few males completed the questionnaires and they were almost unanimous in some of their views. Fifteen parent interviewees argued that the females took responsibility for the educational matters in the family. Other responses reinforced this view that the females were the main nurturers and that traditional family roles were evident in many of the local families. Despite this, while males may not have been active in their support, they did in general support religious education. The interview data suggested that some males were too busy at work or could have been unaware of the questionnaires, if the females had automatically taken it upon themselves to complete it as part of their role as managers of all things to do with education. A minor opinion was that males were not interested in religion and therefore religious education and, one view was that the majority of males could be threatened by the nature of the questionnaire as a result of a lack of knowledge about religious education.

From the interviews and questionnaires, it was clear that when the school attempted to communicate with parents about the religious education curriculum, it was predominantly communicating with women who accepted that they had the major role in dealing with educational matters for the family.

*Parent Involvement with School and Religious Education*

Table 5.8 examines the involvement of the parents in religious education in the school. This includes data on the language used in religious education and its effect on the parents, the willingness of the parents to become involved in religious education, the role religious education played in the choice of school for the children of the parents, how the parents valued and showed that they valued religious education, the effectiveness of communication about religious education between school and home including parent-teacher interviews and those features of the religious education program seen by parents as having particular importance.

*Table 5.8 Parent involvement with the school and religious education*

Why did parents find particular RE language not helpful?	parents threatened/uncomfortable (11); teachers are ‘experts’ (9); parents not used to terms (7); school’s role to teach RE language (7); ‘religious’ parents are OK with terms (7); language has a negative link to televangelists (5); ‘traditional language is a turn off (2); parents have no interest (2); no adult faith education limits knowledge (2); language is seen as too intellectual (2); parents use other language to express a similar meaning (2); Church language is irrelevant (2); there is no talk of religion with children (1); parents should know this language (1)
Why do parent not want input into RE?	Parents’ lack of confidence/know little (9); school are experts (9); intimidating if there is low knowledge (7); parents feel the same with all subjects (6); parents may not be ‘religious’ (6); high knowledge is needed for parent to be ‘religious’ (4); more interest in other subjects (4); religion is irrelevant (3); apathy (4); no time (2); lapsed Catholics (2); religion has a poor image (1); parents feel that they have no right due to not’ practicing’ a faith (1); not welcome (1); not wanted by teens (1)
Why was RE an important part of the choice of this secondary school for many parents?	RE offers an extra, intangible dimension (8); it is a safe, value-based environment (7); there are opportunities for moral and faith development (7); RE encourages social responsibility (6); RE provides moral infrastructure (6); life values covered in RE add strength to children (6); community service (6); RE adds to the school atmosphere (5); it is a Catholic school (5); it is about being Christian (5); parents have an interest in RE (5); RE has a core influence on staff and children (4); it is not really important; the real reasons are discipline, uniform, etc (4); RE is THE priority for some

	parents (3); some parents want a general religious education and knowledge (3); most parents are likely to respond this way because they have chosen it (3); children need to be taught about religion (2); it is often a student choice (2); parents want a practical-moral RE, not a God-centred one (2); parents hope that RE makes a difference (2); Some parents feel that it is the Catholic thing to do so (2);
Do parents value RE? How do they show it?	Parents should give more positive encouragement to children (11); parents should ask questions at home (10); parents only contact school if a need arises (7); parents value RE but do not show it openly (7); parents want openness not indoctrination (7); RE should get equal time as other subjects at home (6); parents could occasionally take children to Church (5); parents have low knowledge of RE (5); families have home discussions (4); parents hope that RE adds to happiness of student (2); teachers rarely contact parents about RE (1)
Communication about RE – website and other	Parents use school website – not at all or rarely (12); parents might use website if referred to in newsletter (6); parent work discourages face to face with teacher (4); parents prefer meetings when they are engaged in dialogue (3); distance to meetings is a problem (1); electronic communication is becoming the norm (2); electronic mode is not good for personal issues (2); parent website education is needed (2); if forms, etc on the website it would encourage use of the site (2)
Communication about RE – newsletter	Newsletter are a regular source of information(10); They are discussion starters (7); hardcopy is best (7); electronic copy is flexible, convenient (7); newsletter gives time to digest information (5); weekly – important (4); regular RE report is expected (3); newsletter needs good layout (2); may not give parent views on issues (1); if RE reports are too regular – ‘here we go again’ (1)
Low attendance at Parent-Teacher interviews for RE	Parents go to what they need to (10); RE holds low academic value/interest (8); parents’ busy lifestyle (5); regular RE reports are enough (3); attendance is affected by parents low knowledge of RE (3); parents have low respect for the education of the whole person (3); ‘I attend – it’s great’ (2); parents find religious discussion confronting (2); if parents have a genuine interest in their child, they will attend (2); didn’t realise parents were invited (1); parents should not be intimidated as the interview is about the child not them (1); parents feel under-educated (1)
Most important aspect of RE for family/student	Community service/social justice (7); retreats/seminars (5); morality (5); intrinsic values for life (4); learning about a range of religions (4); student connection of sacraments, theology, etc and life (3); RE is a place to consider spirituality and religion (3); RE reinforces home values and beliefs (3); this is difficult (2); RE helps to counter negative publicity of religion in society (2); RE makes children more

	open to life (2); Need to make RE relevant to today (2); RE leads to greater family harmony (1); RE helps to develop the meaning and value of love (1); religion is part of life (1); presenting Jesus simply (1); passionate teachers (1); fear of losing primary school intimacy (1)
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The parents who were interviewed were asked to offer suggestions as to why the majority of the parents who completed the questionnaires believed that a range of theoretical and theological language was not helpful to them in discussing religious education. All but one parent expressed that they and other parents were not comfortable or confident with the use of such terms as catechesis, evangelization, ministry or mission. It was generally argued in the interviews that parents lacked confidence in the use of such language and that this led to feelings of being threatened by, and uncomfortable with, the terms. The data from the interviews proposed that the parents were not used to talking about religion, and this lack of familiarity led to some of the discomfort. It was considered likely that those parents who were active in religious communities would be more comfortable with the language. Fifty percent of parents associated the knowledge of specialized language with the role of religious education teachers whom they regarded as the experts in the religious education field. It was thought that trust was bestowed on religious education teachers as a compensation for a lack of parental understanding of the language. A minority response was that there was negativity in the eyes of parents towards this type of language as the terms could be associated with television evangelists, therefore associating religion and religious education with such religious identities. There was also the link of limited parental knowledge of the language with a lack of adult faith education in the Catholic Church, making the language irrelevant to many parents who may use other more common terms to describe similar realities. Overall, most parents did

not find theological or specialised educational terms helpful in discussing religious education.

The data gathered by the questionnaire indicated that 16% of the parents agreed with parents being involved in planning religious education. The data also showed that the parents were divided in their thoughts on whether there was a need for more opportunities for parents to become involved in the religious education in the school. In the interviews, parents were invited to discuss the reasons behind this general lack of enthusiasm from parents to become involved at this level. Some common themes that developed in the responses indicated that a lack of knowledge led to this hesitancy or reluctance by parents. This lack of knowledge was expressed by nine of the 16 parents interviewed as intimidating for the parents, who didn't want to appear ignorant, with the same number saying that the school was being held up as the 'expert'. The perception that high levels of knowledge of scripture and theology were needed for someone to be 'religious' was a stumbling block for the involvement of some parents. On the other hand, many of the parents expressed the view that parents are not usually keen to become involved in any subject at school, and that this reaction to religious education was similar to the normal attitude to all aspects of the curriculum. There was also an explanation that touched on the view that some parents were simply apathetic towards religious education as a subject because it was not seen as academically valuable. One minor consideration was the way that some of the parents perceived themselves as not particularly welcome in the secondary school, usually after experiencing close ties with the primary school. Generally, the lack of knowledge of religious education was offered by some of the parents as a reason for the general parent population to remain distant from involvement in this subject in the school. There was a fear that parents could be exposed as ignorant or of not being 'religious' enough to be able to contribute effectively.

During the interviews, the parents were asked to suggest reasons why 70% of the parents responded in the questionnaires that religious education was an important part of the choice of secondary school for their children. The responses given in the interviews provided a range of views which raised the contribution of religious education to intangibles, such as the general atmosphere of the school and to religious education adding an 'extra dimension', as explained by half of the parents. This was positively linked by the parents to religious education providing opportunities for faith and moral development within a values-based culture that goes beyond the academic expectations. This emphasis on values continued into religious education being associated with the provision of a moral infrastructure that encouraged social responsibility and which gave their children values for life, especially when needing strength to face problems. The participating parents were attracted by the community service program within religious education, with its focus on giving of self to others, a focus which the parents saw as being present throughout the school among staff and students. Then, there were the parents for whom the 'Catholic' and 'Christian' nature of the school was sufficient reason to send their children to that school. Alternatively, there were a smaller number of the parents who believed that, for many of the parents, religious education was not, in fact, important at all and that the main reason for these parents choosing this school was the perceptions of it as a 'private' school with strong discipline, with a strong uniform policy and offering a 'better' education (4). In addition, five of the parents saw the value of a general religious education as adding to the whole education of their children. Therefore, the general response of the parents was that religious education was important as part of the choice of school because it contributed to an 'atmosphere' of moral and social responsibility which supported the development of values and networks that their children could access as they made choices and lived out their Catholic or other life styles.

When the parents were asked how those parents who valued religious education, and 80% of those who completed questionnaires agreed that they did value it, could show this to their children and the school, the majority of parents interviewed suggested that they could offer positive encouragement to children in relation to their religious education. This included the parents asking questions at home about religious education classes. About half the parents interviewed thought that parents actually value religious education even if this was not openly demonstrated. Similarly, 10 of the 16 parents responded in the interviews that parents usually responded on a needs basis about religious education, for example, attending parent teacher interviews when there was a specific request or purpose, but not engaging if all seemed to be going smoothly. There was the view from 38% of parents that religious education should be given the same amount of time at home as other subjects, and that perhaps parents could occasionally encourage their children to be involved in the local religious community activities in order to reinforce the ideas dealt within religious education.

Again, low parental knowledge was offered by some parents as a reason for low involvement with religious education at home. About half the parents indicated that they supported religious education if it encouraged openness to religion rather than if it attempted to indoctrinate children into the Catholic faith. In general terms, the parents expressed a valuing of religious education and suggested practical ways of showing support at home in ways similar to other subjects. They further indicated that the lack of knowledge about religion generally affected their confidence to become involved in religious education and they saw their involvement as 'needs-based'. Therefore, the parents responded that there was an interest in religious education, although this was not always evident in the way that the parents engaged with the school. Eleven of the 16

parents acknowledged the benefits of openly supporting the religious education curriculum at home through discussions and respecting it as they did other subjects.

The parents were asked in the interviews why parents may have expressed the view in the questionnaire that newsletters were a widely approved way of communicating about religious education at school. Approximately half of the interviewed parents said that parents valued the newsletter being distributed both in electronic (email and on the website) form and in hardcopy. They saw the electronic version as convenient for 'working' parents who could access it when time allowed, but the hardcopy was still valuable because of its constant presence on the refrigerator or bench to be read in a spare moment at home. Of the interviewed parents, 11 of the 16 expected to see a regular religious education item in the newsletter, with this section often being a prompt for discussion with their children. It was noted by a small number of those interviewed that electronic methods were the developing norm for communication, but face to face was still preferred for personal or sensitive issues. In general, the interviewed parents valued the flexibility of the newsletter and expected religious education to have regular items within the newsletter.

According to the data from the questionnaires, 74% of the parents supported the establishment of a religious education section of the college website as a good means of communication with the parents about religious education. However, 75% of parents interviewed did not look at the school website in relation to religious education, or anything else for that matter. A few said that they would use it if there was specific reference to the site in the religious education section of the newsletter. Others said that if the religious education department wanted to use the website as a major means of communication, then there was a need to educate parents about the website, and suggested that use of the website could be encouraged by having essential forms and curriculum links

easily accessible on the website. The parent interview data showed that although parents liked the idea of the website as a source of information about religious education, they had not yet begun to access the website with regularity.

Regular meetings to discuss religious education were not generally supported in the interviews with the participating parents. Meetings were seen as beneficial if the parents were engaged in dialogue and were not simply being 'talked at'. Parents' engagement in work outside the home was offered by some as a hindrance to face to face contact at meetings, as was the distance that some parents needed to travel in this locality. When asked in the interviews why there was a low attendance at parent-teacher interviews for religious education, ten of the parents indicated that parents only attended these when there was a perceived need to see the teacher. Half of the parents who completed the questionnaires agreed that parents should attend religious education parent-teacher meetings as much as other subjects. Half of the interviewees also responded that religious education was of low academic interest or value to parents, and as such would not warrant an interview. Busy lifestyles were offered by five of the parents as a reason for low attendance. A range of minority views offered in the interviews included the belief that regular reports provided enough information about religious education and that discussions about religious education could be seen as confronting to some of the parents. A small number of the parents interviewed saw that the low attendance at meetings and interviews related to religious education was a response to those parents not valuing the education of the whole person. Some parents actually found the regular religious education parent-teacher interviews valuable and enjoyable experiences. Overall, parents responded that they attended meetings when they deemed these necessary, but that pressures from work and lifestyle made them selective as to attendance. The low academic interest and

knowledge of religious education was offered as a key factor in explaining low attendance at parent-teacher interviews.

In response to the final question of the interviews, the parents noted a wide range of aspects of religious education, which they rated as of particular importance. Some of these included components of the religious education program, such as community service and social justice, retreats and seminar programs out of the classroom, work on moral development, development of intrinsic values for life and learning about a range of religious traditions in order to develop religious tolerance.

In summary, the data from the questionnaires and interviews agreed that many of the parents found theological or specialised educational terms unhelpful in discussing religious education, and the lack of knowledge of religious education led the parents to remain distant from involvement. There was a perception that a number of parents feared being exposed as ignorant or of not being 'religious' enough to offer involvement. The data showed that parental attitudes and involvement in religious education were similar to their attitudes and involvement in other subjects. The data confirmed that religious education was important as part of the choice of school for the parents because it contributed to an 'atmosphere' of moral and social responsibility, which supported the development of values and networks that their children could access as they made choices and lived out their Catholic or other life styles.

Generally, the parents responded that there was a genuine interest in religious education, although this was not always evident in the way that the parents engaged with the school. Eleven parents acknowledged the benefits of openly supporting the religious education curriculum at home. The regular newsletters were seen by parents as good sources of information about religious education, but the parents generally only attended meetings if they perceived a specific need being addressed. Low academic interest in and

knowledge of religious education was offered as a key factor in explaining low attendance by the parents at religious education meetings.

### *Content of Religious Education*

Table 5.9 provides data on what the interviewed parents thought should be incorporated into the religious education curriculum including opportunities for moral and spiritual development, and evaluating what happens in society in relation to the values and practices that are seen as prominent in contemporary society.

*Table 5.9 Parent responses to what should be part of the content of religious education*

Should religious education be optional for students in Years 11 and 12?	RE not valued in relation to post-Yr12 (13); fear RE could lower VCE results (11); yes – give other subjects more time (10); no – devalues religion in life (9); minority would select (9); no value of RE (8); no value of education of whole person (8); community service is good (7); definitely no option (6); retreats great (6); low knowledge of RE leads to low value of RE (6); supportive place to explore faith (5); time for mature engagement on religion (2); only Yr 12 optional (2); VCE teaching may separate RE and life (1); fear indoctrination (1); fear unproductive classes (1); other subjects optional so for RE (1); children want option (1); RE should be relevant to student age and stage (1); optional classes easier to teach, better for children in them (1); hard to address intrinsic development (1)
Should religious education teach about multiple religious traditions?	Minor for other religions – tolerance (14); Catholic – definitely (13); emphasise Catholic (12); compare Catholic to others (10); reinforce home faith tradition (6); helps families with low knowledge (4); Plurality – need to understand own religion before others (3); Catholic cult days gone (3); hard to provide for all (1); classes for religions (1)
The value of teaching about morality within religious education	Extremely important (14); life values – right and wrong (12); point of reference for societal values (7); affect lifestyle and career (5); reinforce Catholic/Christian values of home (5); only place for moral analysis (3); other subjects should be less ‘religious’ eg science (2); should not be forced on children (2); range of views needed (2); important but not major (1)
The value of spiritual development in religious	Very important, especially for those ‘spiritual’ (13); something to go back to – ‘a light in the dark’ (6); important as lacking in society (6);

education	creates well-rounded individuals (6); seen by some as zealous / pushy / scary (6); difficult to define spirituality (5); need to balance media, society (5); regular times for reflection, prayer (4); important to learn to value quiet (4); difficult to address in RE (3); asking questions of meaning (3); develop intrinsic value against materialism (3); from home, school can reinforce (2); classroom not good place (2); helps parental guilt about lack at home (1); can see evidence in children (1)
Should religious education evaluate the values and practices of contemporary society?	Definite (13); helps student to think about societal messages (11); asks 'why' about society and compares to Christian (11); prepare of independence beyond family and school (8); helps less materialistic (8); helps when things go wrong – draw on other values than society (7); enormous benefits (7); relates to morality – awareness of poverty and consumerism (6); alternate view helps with free will (4); only place for evaluative processes (4); not expected in RE (2); community service contrasts to materials (2); environmental values – the big picture (2)

The questionnaire data showed that the majority of the parents who responded agreed with compulsory religious education at Years 7-10, but did not agree with a compulsory religious education policy at Years 11 and 12. Nearly all, 13 of 16, of the parent interviewees believed that the main reason for supporting optional religious education in Years 11 and 12 was that religious education was not valued as a factor in post-school education or work placement. Nine of 16 parents believed that there was concern that optional religious education at the senior level would lead to a devaluing of religious education at that and lower levels as a subject and as important for life generally, and that this would lead to a minority of children choosing it as a subject. As well, 11 of the 16 interview responses said that parents were probably concerned that time devoted to religious education at this senior level may interfere with their children's VCE results and that the time currently devoted to religious education should therefore be given to other subjects. In contrast with this view, about half of the interviewed parents were concerned that those who opposed religious education at this level were not really concerned about

the development of the whole person, but that they had the VCE results as their sole focus. A minority of the parents interviewed were definitely against optional religious education at this level of the school. About 40% of the interviews showed that the current retreat and community service experiences open to their children were seen as positive components of the senior religious education program. Again, low parental knowledge of what occurred in religious education was offered as a reason for the support offered for optional religious education at Years 11 and 12. In general, the compulsory senior religious education program was seen by those interviewed as lacking the general support of parents as a vital dimension of Years 11 and 12 at the school. The interviews indicated that 13 of the 16 parents saw religious education as not adding to the post-secondary educational or vocational options of their children.

In support of the questionnaire data, 13 of the 16 parents interviewed showed that they supported the practice of teaching about the Roman Catholic tradition as a primary focus of the school, and all of the parents agreed that teaching about other religious traditions was very important for the development of religious tolerance. This was seen as assisting in the development of cultural tolerance which may in turn lead to a better understanding of others, with less negative judgment of religious practices different from those of the children's families. It was also seen by 10 of the 16 parents interviewed that knowledge of a range of religious traditions allowed their children to compare and contrast the Catholic tradition and its beliefs against these other traditions. Some of the interviewees saw that this was important for those parents who were insecure and unsure of handling the transmission of the Catholic tradition in their own families. The parent responses were similar for Catholic and non-Catholic parents. There was a smaller group of the parents who took part in the interviews who thought that the school's religious education should support the Catholic and other religious faiths and values present in

families. There were other suggestions from the interviews, such as having separate classes for different religious traditions, and there was also the acknowledgement that it was difficult for the school to address the needs of all the religious traditions represented by children. The general response of the parents was that the Catholic tradition was to take prominence in religious education, but that other religious traditions should be touched upon to encourage religious tolerance and to enable a comparison of the Catholic tradition with other traditions.

The parents interviewed and those who completed the questionnaires showed support for moral development within religious education. All interviewees rated moral development as extremely important in the religious education of their children. Similarly, 12 of the 16 interviewees linked morality with the capacity of their children to make good decisions about what was right and wrong in society. Moral education was seen as linked to personal lifestyle choices and careers by about a third of interviewees. Similar numbers of the parents interviewed associated moral development with supporting home values. A small number of the parents thought that the religious education class was one of the only places where moral analysis of issues took place in secondary education in the school. A limited number of the parents interviewed said that other subject areas such as science should be less 'Catholic' in their treatment of topics such as genetic manipulation in science and business management strategies in economics. The dominant response of the parents was that morality education was important for their children's development and that this would provide them with skills for life-long decision-making.

Following on from the questionnaire in which 88% of parents supported teaching about spirituality in religious education, 13 of the 16 interviewees supported the view that spirituality and opportunities for spiritual development were key expectations of the

religious education program. However, five of the parents interviewed had difficulty defining what they meant by 'spirituality'. Another six parents described spiritual development in religious education as something to come back to, "a light in the dark" for when things became difficult. Some parents said that religious education was important for their children as there was a lack of opportunities for spiritual development in society generally. There was also the view from some of the parents that spirituality assisted in the development of a balanced or well-rounded individual. About 40% of the interviewed parents noted that the terminology 'spirituality' could be linked in the minds of some parents with religious movements that are seen to apply negative pressure on young people. A small number of the interviewed parents acknowledged the difficulties faced in providing opportunities for spiritual growth in classrooms. Some of the parents saw time spent in the chapel, on retreats and during seminar days as probably better times to provide activities designed to address spiritual development. A quarter of the responses from the parents' interviews advocated that religious education should teach children to learn the value of being quiet. One parent claimed to have positive evidence of spiritual growth in her children as a result of the activities related to spiritual development beyond the classroom at school. Overall, the parents' questionnaire and interview data supported the aim of spiritual development for their children, even if it was challenging to define spirituality and difficult to develop key dimensions of spirituality at school.

The interviews provided solid support for the questionnaire findings, that the vast majority of those parents agreed that religious education should evaluate the values and practices of contemporary society. There was a definite expectation in the data from the interviews that religious education should engage in critiquing the values present in society. The data also indicated that parents expected religious education to help their children to become more aware of the values being presented by the media and by other

influences in society. Religious education was expected to help children to be able to compare societal values, the values of the family and Christian values, by 13 of the 16 parents. About half of the interviewed parents linked evaluating society in religious education to the development of skills that would help the children to live independent lives, to become less materialistic and to become more aware of poverty and consumerism. The parents saw these critiquing skills as being helpful to their children so that in times when things went wrong they could draw on these skills to analyse what was occurring and how it was affecting their lives. Just less than half of the parents interviewed saw these skills as of enormous benefit to their children while some parents associated the skills with the student's ability to develop and fully implement an informed conscience.

A quarter of the parents in the interviews believed that religious education was the only place in the school where this critiquing of society would take place. Linked into this finding was the small numbers of parents who wanted environmental issues, community service, humanitarian values and the value of human life to form part of this evaluation of society. In general, the parents agreed that within religious education there was a place for helping their children to develop the skills necessary for evaluating the values and practices present in contemporary society.

In summary, there was a lack of support for compulsory religious education classes at the senior level. The parents agreed that Catholic teachings should take precedence, but that education about other faith traditions should be included. Moral and spiritual developments were seen as core elements of religious education, as was teaching children how to evaluate the practices and values of contemporary society.

*Parents and some Aspects of the Nature and Purpose of Religious Education*

Table 5.10 shows the views of the parents on a range of topics including the academic nature of religious education, the role of the teacher as a witness to Catholic faith, and whether students should have a choice about attendance at school liturgies.

*Table 5.10 Parents and some aspects of the nature and purpose of religious education*

Why would RE be seen as less academic than other subjects?	No VCE value (10); low parent knowledge equals low value (9); treat all subjects the same (7); RE seen as more personal (4); non-VCE would be good enough (4); no VCE value equals low student value (3); RE has higher level thought (2); non-VCE RE would lessen confusion (2); low compared to Maths/English (2); should be optional like other VCE subjects (1); low parent academic leads to low expectation of RE (1); subjective and difficult to assess (1)
Should teachers be seen as witnesses to the Catholic tradition?	All teachers in school should live by Christian principles (15); teachers influence children/role models (10); broad respect for Catholic and religion generally (10); Catholic witness most desirable then Christian (10); most parents want Christian – ‘not too Catholic’ (7); good person (7); knowledge not enough (7); Church goes not necessary (6); school sets expectations (5); secular limits Catholic (5); no witness – hypocritical (5); open, happy, sincere, competent (4); what is ‘Catholic’? (4); staff RE first with best (3); allow student questioning (1); help student work through issues (1); interested in children (1); less RE better than lesser RE teacher (1)
Should liturgy attendance be optional for non-Catholic and other children?	No option – it is a Catholic school (14); negative impact on school (12); less attendance (12); lose part of Catholic school (11); expect respect (11); part of faith development (11); graduation Mass wonderful (11); only exposure to liturgy (6); broadens religious knowledge (5); leads to segregation (4); flow on effect of opting out (3); student choice (1)

A minority of 31% of the parents who responded to the questionnaires agreed that religious education should be made as academically challenging as other subjects in the school curriculum. In the interviews, 10 of the 16 parents agreed that they and/or other parents regarded religious education as a less academic subject compared with most other subjects, especially at the Year 12 level. The reason for this perception, offered by 10 of

the parents interviewed, was that religious education was not seen as contributing to the VCE results of their children. Nine of the parents interviewed also responded that this negative valuing of religious education at the senior level may be the result of an ignorance or lack of understanding of what constitutes the course material and processes of religious education at this level. The parents seemed not to realise that the VCE religious education units could, in fact, contribute towards the VCE score at the Year 12 level on a similar basis to subjects such as one of the core subjects, English. In addition, and supporting this reality, there was also the view from about 44% of parents in the interviews that all subjects should be treated equally at the senior level, including religious education. With over half of the parents who responded to the questionnaires agreeing that religious education should have assessment tasks similar to other subjects, the combined data showed that many parents had concerns about the academic status of religious education. It was also recognised that there was a need to maintain high educational standards in religious education with formal assessments as in other subjects (7 of 16 parents). There was a diverse range of responses with parents questioning the value of religious education for later careers and yet acknowledging a range of academic qualities within the subject.

In addition, there was some parental support for the idea that religious education was seen by some parents as a subject more attuned to the personal needs and interests of their children, and that this may have influenced parental perceptions of the academic nature of the subject. This was supported by interview responses that suggested a place for less academic units of religious education at the senior year levels. In general, the questionnaires and interviews with parents generated a range of views with many parents questioning the academic value of religious education in light of perceptions that it did not contribute to the post-secondary education or vocations of their children, but there was also support for the educational components, such as assessment, that was seen to be

required at the same level as other subjects. Ignorance of the nature of the units of religious education taught could be a factor in the parents' low regard for the academic status of religious education.

The parents interviewed were nearly unanimous in their expectation that teachers of religious education, and all teachers in the school, should live according to Christian principles. The teacher was seen by these parents as a role model for their children and, as such, it was agreed that teachers should have a broad respect for religion and the Catholic tradition. In the responses to the questionnaires, the call for teachers to be witnesses to the Catholic faith was not as prominent with 59% of questionnaire parents agreeing with this stance and 22% of them disagreeing. The first preference for the majority of the parents interviewed was to have Catholics teaching religious education and then for those other teachers to be Christian, if not Catholic. Some of the parents, about half of those interviewed, thought that many of the other parents would be happy with a less 'Catholic' and a more general Christian approach by teachers. The religious education teacher was expected, by about 38% of the parents interviewed, to be a good person, but not necessarily one who attended Church on a regular basis. The teacher was seen by about half of those interviewed to be more than one with the necessary knowledge, and if teachers were not witnesses, some of the parents thought that it was hypocritical of them to be teaching religious education.

A minority of the parents raised the issue of the difficulty in defining 'a Catholic teacher' or 'Catholic' generally in the world of today, and similar numbers were concerned about the impact of secular staff on the Catholic nature of the school. This was aligned to the expectations of some of the parents that the school needed to clearly define expectations for the whole staff in terms of Catholic or Christian witness. A small number of the parents supported religious education staffing taking priority when allocating

teacher work loads, while one parent believed that it was better to have less religious education than to have 'lesser' teachers in religious education classes. In general, there was support for teachers of religious education, and for all teachers, in the Catholic school to be witnesses to the Catholic faith tradition. There was some question from parents of just what this witness should entail in terms of participation in the life of the Church outside the school.

Following the questionnaire data, which showed that three quarters of those parents agreed that Masses and prayer services for the whole school should be compulsory, the parents interviewed were 88% in favour of all children attending liturgies, as long as compulsory attendance at liturgies was covered in the enrolment process. All interviewees said that the fact that it was a Catholic school was sufficient reason for attendance. In their responses to the questionnaire, 24% of the parents agreed that liturgical attendance should be optional for non-Catholics, but this was not supported by the interview data. Most parents interviewed believed that optional attendance would lead to fewer numbers attending and this would have a negative impact on the school.

It was agreed by more than half of the interviewees that the school cannot force prayer, but can expect children to attend and respect the Catholic traditions and liturgy. It was argued by 11 of the parents that optional attendance would lead to a loss of an essential part of what it means to be a Catholic school. In relation to school liturgies as an important opportunity for the children's faith development, 11 of the 16 parents interviewed agreed that this was a good thing. The special liturgies, such as the end of year graduation Mass for Year 12 students, were mentioned by 11 parents as evidence of the respect and response of their children to liturgy and prayer. Four of the parents were fearful that optional liturgy attendance would lead to segregation, with students challenging participation in other aspects of religious education. School liturgies may be

the only exposure for a large number of the student population to religious liturgy (6 parents) and similar numbers of parents saw liturgy as a way of broadening student knowledge of religion (5). In general, the parents who participated in the questionnaires and interviews agreed on the compulsory nature of school liturgies, as long as all parents were made fully aware of this at enrolment. Liturgy was seen as essential to the nature of a Catholic school.

### Conclusion

The data from the questionnaires and interviews provided a range of insights into how the parents who participated in the research believed that they and other parents understood various aspects of the religious education curriculum. Far more of the parents of Year 7 and 12 students were prepared to complete surveys (29%) than there were of this group prepared to participate in interviews (6%). A small number of the questionnaires were completed by males (7%) but about half of the interviewees were males. Of the interviewed parents, 15 of the 16 believed that this gender imbalance in the questionnaires was because the females took the educational duties upon themselves, even to the point of some males not being aware of the opportunity to participate, although some males may have been apathetic or too busy with work commitments to give it the required time. Over 80% of the parents believed that they benefited from completing the questionnaires.

Three quarters of the population who completed the questionnaire said that at least one parent was Catholic but over 70% of these parents did not attend Church services regularly. The data showed that about half of the parents had attended Catholic schools and the majority of these had positive memories of religious education from those school days. This, undoubtedly, contributed to the sending of their children to this Catholic

school with 70% of the parents indicating that religious education was a major factor in the decision of school for their children.

The majority of the parents, in both the interviews and the questionnaires, agreed that their preferred mode of communication with the school about religious education was through electronic means such as email and websites rather than meetings, including parent-teacher evenings. For 10 of the 16 parents, the regular newsletter was a source of information, but 12 of the 16 did not use the website regularly to find out about religious education. Nine of the 16 parents did not want involvement in the religious education planning at the school and the main reasons offered were that parents lacked knowledge of the religious education curriculum and that this was the responsibility of the 'expert' school staff. They admitted to having little knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum or the SCP approach to teaching religious education. In addition, the parents who responded to both data collecting exercises were united in their general discomfort with the theological or theoretical language which is sometimes used to discuss religious education.

Over 80% of the parents who responded to both questionnaires and interviews expressed support for aspects of the content of the religious education curriculum such as: community service, social justice, moral education, opportunities for spiritual development, giving the students an opportunity to discuss personal reactions to issues generally and about the Catholic Church in particular, learning about a range of religious traditions with the Catholic tradition taking the central place, Bible studies, the effects of cults and fundamentalism today, and having a solid understanding of the Catholic tradition to support the students' search for meaning in life and personal faith.

The data from the questionnaires showed that 75% of the parents were supportive of students in the school attending liturgies, irrespective of personal faith traditions, and

they agreed that a range of prayer experiences was expected for all students. Although more than half the parents advocated compulsory religious education in Years 7-12 in the interviews, 74% of the parents who responded to the questionnaires indicated that optional religious education at Years 11 and 12 was preferable. Many of the interviewees suggested that this might be because of a lack of parental knowledge of what is taught and how it is taught at the senior levels, although the questionnaire data showed that about half the parents thought that they had a good knowledge of the religious education curriculum. The most common reason (13 of 16) offered in the interviews for supporting optional religious education was that there was no perceived link between religious education and post-school education or vocational training, but this view was seen by nine of the parents as potentially contributing to a devaluing of religion in life and religious education in the whole school.

It was also noted in the questionnaires, and supported in the interviews, that over 80% of the parents valued the religious education curriculum of the school, although the interviews indicated that many parents did not openly show this in their dealings with the school. The interviews suggested that this may be because parents leave religious education to the 'expert' teachers due to a lack of confidence and knowledge, and also because most of the parents may not have had a close relationship with an organized religion for a long time.

The interview data provided a range of reasons for why 90% of the parents who responded to the questionnaires had agreed that religious education should provide students with skills to evaluate the values and practices in society today and to assess the impact of religion today. The parents explained that the influence of the media was powerful in presenting values that supported materialism and consumerism, and that the constant challenges to Christian morality required that young people have the skills to

critique these messages. In the interviews, the parents indicated that they expected the teachers to be role models for the Catholic and Christian beliefs and values that were seen by parents as often under challenge in society generally.

Overall, the questionnaire and interview data showed that the parents who responded valued religious education and expected the school to be a place where the key beliefs and moral teachings of the Catholic Church were lived out by both staff and students. There were some concerns about the academic value of the religious education units at the senior levels, but 13 of the 16 parents in the interviews supported the value of religious education in preparing their children to become young adults who were capable of evaluating what was happening in society in order to make moral judgments which would lead to spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE DATA FROM THE TEACHERS

### Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected from the religious education teachers of the school through the questionnaire and interviews, according to the process outlined in Chapter three. This data was gathered using two instruments – a written questionnaire completed by 17 teachers in the religious education faculty and an interview with the 14 teachers who agreed to participate in the interview. The questionnaire consisted of Part A which was given to the teachers only, and Part B which was completed by both parents and teachers. The data collected from the questionnaires was the stimulus for the interviews which investigated possible reasons behind the findings that emerged from the questionnaire. The data gathered from the questionnaires is first summarised and then used, together with the responses to the interviews, to discuss the views of the teachers of religious education on a range of topics associated with the religious education curriculum and linked to the relationship between the school and the parents.

### Summary of Responses to the Teacher Questionnaires

#### *Profile of the Teachers of Religious Education in the School*

Table 6.1 provides information about the teachers who completed the questionnaires. It shows their teaching experience, their professional qualifications and their reported level of satisfaction with teaching religious education.

*Table 6.1 Profile of the teachers of religious education in the school*

TQ1	Years teaching RE	0-2 Years (%) 12	2-5 Years (%) 29	5-10 Years (%) 6	10+ Years (%) 53	
TQ2	Professional Qualifications in RE	Yes 53	No 47			
TQ3	Highest Level of RE Qualification (for those with RE qualifications)	Dip Ed (accredited to teach RE) (%) 36	Certificate in RE (%) 9	RE Grad Diploma (%) 36	B Theol (%) 9	Master RE (%) 9
		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)		
TQ4	High satisfaction with teaching RE	6	18	77		
B58	Completing the questionnaire was helpful to think about RE	6	6	88		

### *Teacher Experience and Qualifications*

The questionnaire data showed that more than half of the teachers (59%) had been teaching religious education for more than five years, with most of these having more than ten years of experience. The other 41% of the teachers had less than five years experience, including 12% of them who were in their first two years of teaching religious education. Approximately half of the teachers (53%) had professional qualifications in religious education including approximately one-third (36%) who had gained qualifications as part of their Diploma of Education, while another 36% had a Graduate Diploma in Religious education. There was one teacher with a Certificate of Religious Education, one with a Bachelor of Theology. One religious education teacher had a Master of Religious Education.

### *Teacher Satisfaction with Teaching Religious Education*

The data indicated that most of the teachers (77%) expressed agreement when asked if they had a high level of satisfaction in teaching religious education. One teacher disagreed and three were uncertain. When asked if completing this questionnaire was helpful for them to reflect on the nature and purpose of religious education, nearly all the teachers (88%) agreed that it was of value. One teacher disagreed and one was uncertain. Overall, the teachers were experienced religious education teachers who enjoyed their role, with about half having academic qualifications in the field of religious education.

### *Parent Involvement in the School and Religious Education*

Table 6.2 provides data on the perceptions of the teachers regarding the parents' expectations and knowledge of religious education. It includes the teachers' views on the use of specialised language and the impact of religious education textbooks on the parents.

*Table 6.2: The views of teachers about parent involvement in the school and in religious education*

		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)
TQ5	Parents value RE	12	47	41
TQ6	Parents have good knowledge of RE	59	41	0
TQ7	Parents have unreal expectations of RE	24	53	24
TQ9	Parents expect RE to increase Mass attendance	82	12	6
TQ19	Terms confusing for the parents	13	13	76
B32	RE Textbooks will inform the parents	30	18	53

### *Teachers' Views on Parents' Valuing and Knowledge of Religious Education*

The data from the teacher questionnaires indicated that approximately half of the teachers were uncertain as to whether the parents valued religious education or not. A further 41%

agreed that the parents valued religious education and 12% disagreed. When presented with the statement that the parents had a good knowledge of what is done in religious education, no teacher agreed with this, with 59% of the teachers disagreeing and the remaining 41% of the teachers being uncertain. Half of the teachers (53%) were not certain about whether the parents had unrealistic expectations of religious education while a quarter (24%) thought that they did have unrealistic expectations, and the remaining 24% of the teachers disagreed with this position. A majority (82%) said that the parents did not expect Mass attendance to improve because of religious education.

Most of the teachers (76%) responded that terms such as evangelisation, catechesis, witnessing, inculturation, ministry and mission were generally confusing for the parents. About half of the teachers (53%) thought that the religious education text, when taken home, would inform the parents about Catholicism, but another 35% of the teachers disagreed that it would add to parental knowledge of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the teachers generally questioned the notions that parents valued religious education and knew much about the curriculum content. Most of the teachers thought that parents were realistic about connecting religious education and parish Mass attendance. The use of theological language was seen as not helpful to parents and half of the teachers thought that the use of a text book, without reference in the question to a specific text book, would better inform parents about the Catholic tradition.

### *Content of Religious Education*

Table 6.3 summarises the teacher questionnaire responses to a range of questions related to the content of the religious education curriculum. All of the questions came from the Part B of the questionnaire which was jointly completed by the parents and the teachers.

Table 6.3 Teacher views on the content of religious education

		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)
B1	RE compulsory 7-10	0	0	100
B2	RE optional 11-12	65	12	24
B6	Students need detailed knowledge of Catholic faith	6	6	88
B7	Discussion of personal understanding of teachings	0	0	100
B8	Discuss relevance of Church today	0	12	88
B9	History of Christianity and Catholic Church is important	0	12	88
B10	Express feelings about issues	0	6	94
B11	Encourage to memorise Catholic doctrine and moral codes	59	24	18
B12	Teach about moral values	0	0	100
B13	Teach about right and wrong from Catholic view	0	0	100
B14	Teaching about Jesus and his role in salvation	0	0	100
B16	RE - Community service	0	6	94
B17	RE – social justice issues	0	0	100
B20	RE – other Christian religious traditions	6	0	94
B21	RE – non-Christian religious traditions	6	0	94
B22	Study of other religions – greater acceptance of other religious traditions	0	6	94
B23	Study of other religions – leads to better appreciation of own tradition	0	12	88
B28	RE – stories of Bible heroes	0	18	83
B29	RE – knowledge of Jesus and his teachings from the Bible	0	0	100
B30	Interpret Bible in light of modern Bible scholarship	0	18	82
B31	Yr 7 – Bible for all students	0	6	94
B49	Know about SCP	0	18	82
B50	Know about <i>Awakenings</i>	12	35	53
B51	RE – encourage critical thinking about religion and religious issues	6	6	88
B52	Re – critically evaluate contemporary spiritual and moral issues	0	0	100
B53	Show +ve and –ve influences of religion on lives	0	6	94
B54	Awareness of cults, sects, and fundamentalism	6	6	88
B55	Knowledge of religious conflicts and persecutions in the world today	0	12	88
B56	Evaluate the +ve and –ve impact of religion on society	6	6	88
B57	RE – awareness of cultural influences on values and behaviour	0	12	88

### *Knowledge of Awakenings (CDB, 2005) and Shared Christian Praxis*

The data from the questionnaires, completed by the teachers of religious education, indicated that about half (53%) of the teachers agreed that they had good knowledge of the current religious education curriculum, *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) which is the religious education curriculum document to be followed by all schools of the Diocese of Ballarat. In addition, 12% of the teachers thought that they did not have a good understanding of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and the remaining 35% were uncertain about their level of understanding of this curriculum. SCP is the preferred teaching approach to be used in religious education in the diocese and school. From the responses to the questionnaires, 88% of the teachers responded that they understood this approach while the other 12% of the teachers were uncertain as to the fundamental aspects of SCP.

### *Compulsory Religious Education in the Secondary School*

The questionnaire data from the teachers indicated that there was 100% agreement among the teachers that religious education should be compulsory for all students in Years 7 to 10 in the school. In response to a statement suggesting that religious education should be optional for students in Years 11 and 12, 24% agreed with optional religious education at Years 11 and 12, 65% of the teachers believed that it should be compulsory and 12% of the teachers were not sure.

### *Students Gaining Knowledge of the Catholic Tradition*

A majority of the teachers (89%) were strongly in favour of students having detailed knowledge of the teachings and practices of the Catholic faith by the end of their secondary schooling. All of the teachers who completed the questionnaires agreed that students should be able to discuss their own understandings and reactions to the teachings

of the Church. There was strong agreement among the teachers (88%) that students should be able to discuss the place and relevance of the Church in society today. No teachers of religious education disagreed that the history of Christianity and the Catholic Church was important in religious education, including 88% of the teachers who agreed and the two teachers who were uncertain (12%). Nearly all of the teachers (94%) agreed that religious education should provide the opportunity for students to express their feelings and opinions about issues.

#### *Students Learning About Catholic Moral Teachings*

In response to the questionnaire items on morality, a majority of the teachers (59%) did not agree with the proposition that students should be encouraged to memorise Catholic doctrine and moral codes like the commandments, but 18% of the teachers did support this option while 24% of the teachers were uncertain. All of the teachers agreed that religious education should teach about Catholic moral values and about what is right and wrong from the viewpoint of Catholic teaching.

#### *Teaching about Jesus and Biblical Scholarship*

The questionnaire responses from the teachers showed that there was total agreement that religious education should include teaching about Jesus and his role in salvation. All of the teachers agreed that students should have knowledge of Jesus and his teachings from the Bible, and the data indicated that teaching about biblical heroes was seen by 83% of the teachers as desirable. Almost all the teachers (94%) agreed that students should receive a Bible at the commencement of Year 7 with a majority of the teachers (82%) agreeing that students should learn how to interpret the Bible in light of modern biblical scholarship.

### *Religious Education: Teaching about non-Catholic Religious Traditions*

In response to the question about the teaching of non-Catholic traditions, most (94%) of the teachers agreed that the students should have the opportunity to learn about other Christian religious traditions. There was similar support (94%) for the opportunity for the students to learn about religions other than Christianity. The teachers generally (94%) agreed that study of these other religions could help the students to become more accepting of other religious traditions. There was also strong support (88%) for the proposition that study of other religions could help the students to better appreciate their own religious tradition. A majority (88%) of the teachers agreed that the students should become more aware of the issues surrounding fundamentalism, cults and sects in society. There was similar (88%) support for the students learning about religious conflicts and persecutions in the world today and in history.

### *Community Service and Social Justice as Part of Religious Education*

The data from the questionnaires found that there was almost unanimous teacher support (94%) for the students having some experience of community service within the religious education curriculum. All of the teachers agreed that religious education should address social justice issues. Similarly, all of the teachers responded that the religious education curriculum should help the students to critically evaluate contemporary spiritual and moral issues. In a related response, 88% of the teachers agreed that religious education should help the students to think critically about religion and religious issues. There was also strong support from the teachers (94%) for helping the students to see the positive and negative influences that religion can have on the lives of people.

### *Religious Education and Students Critiquing Society*

Likewise, 88% of the teacher responses agreed that the students should be encouraged to evaluate the impact of religion on society. The teachers also agreed that religious education can help the students to become aware of the cultural influence on people's values and behaviours (88%).

### *Summary*

In summary, approximately half of the teachers were comfortable with their knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum, and most of the teachers expressed familiarity with the SCP methodology. All teachers agreed with Year 7-10 religious education being compulsory and most agreed with compulsory Year 11 and 12 religious education. Approximately 90% of the teachers agreed that study of the Catholic Church, both in history and in contemporary society, was important and about as many agreed that students should have an opportunity within religious education to express their views on issues relevant to them. All teachers supported religious education as a vehicle for developing morality, but the teachers did not give majority support to memorising moral codes. Biblical studies, including New and Old Testament texts, were seen as a priority by the teachers, as was the use of modern approaches applying contemporary scholarship to Scripture study. Most teachers believed that religious education should include the study of non-Catholic traditions, cults and religious conflicts in society both today and in the past. There was also unanimous or near-unanimous support for community service, social justice, evaluating society in relation to its values and practices and generally becoming aware of the impact within society of movements and practices that affect contemporary society.

*Sacraments, Liturgy, Prayer, Witness*

Table 6.4 summarises responses by the teachers to the questions about the liturgical and prayer practices of the school which are linked closely with religious education. It also examines how the teachers viewed the use of the language often used in discussions about religious education. The data displayed in the table also shows how the teachers viewed the role of the teacher as a witness to the Catholic faith.

*Table 6.4 Teacher views on the place of sacraments, liturgy, prayer, witness by the teachers to the Catholic faith and on the language used to discuss religious education*

		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)
TQ8	The teachers have unrealistic expectations of RE	76	24	0
TQ10	RE the teachers expect RE to increase Mass attendance	94	6	0
TQ11	RE teacher should be witness to Catholic faith	12	6	82
TQ12	Help to understand RE – catechesis	12	35	53
TQ13	Help to understand RE – evangelisation	24	35	41
TQ14	Help to understand RE – witnessing	6	6	88
TQ15	Help to understand RE – inculturation	30	35	35
TQ16	Help to understand RE – ministry	6	6	88
TQ17	Help to understand RE – mission	0	0	100
TQ18	Terms confusing for the teachers	29	18	53
B3	Mass and prayer in classes should be compulsory	6	0	94
B4	Mass and prayer at school should be compulsory	0	6	94
B5	Non-Catholics could have optional Mass attendance	100	0	0
B15	RE - increase commitment to religious tradition	36	41	24
B18	RE – promote involvement in parish	29	18	53
B19	Student mass attendance depends on more than RE	36	6	59
B24	RE – offer Mass, sacraments of Catholic Church	0	6	94
B25	RE – meditation experience	0	18	83
B26	RE – different types of prayer practices	0	6	94
B27	RE – traditional prayers of the Christian tradition	0	18	83

*Teacher Expectations of Religious Education*

The data from the questionnaire showed that most of the religious education teachers in the school (82%) agreed that the teacher should be a witness to the faith of the Catholic

Church. Of the other teachers, 12% disagreed. The data also indicated that the majority of the teachers (76%) agreed that the teachers had realistic expectations of what could be achieved by the religious education curriculum as it was applied in classrooms. Some of the teachers (24%) were uncertain about the suitability of the teachers' expectations for religious education. There was almost unanimous agreement (94%) from the teachers that they did not expect religious education to result in more of the students attending Sunday Mass. The teachers (94%) showed support for expecting all of the students to attend all class and whole school liturgies and prayer services. There was total disagreement from the teachers regarding non-Catholic students having the option not to attend Masses. In addition, most of the teachers (94%) agreed that religious education classes should offer the opportunity for the Catholic students to participate in, or be exposed to, the sacraments of the Catholic Church in Eucharist and Reconciliation.

#### *Religious Education and Student Involvement in Religion*

The questionnaire data were divided on whether religious education should make the students more committed to their religious traditions. Thirty-six percent of the teachers disagreed, 24% agreed and 41% were unsure of how successful religious education could be in improving the students' commitment. A slight majority (59%) of the teachers agreed that whether or not a young person attended Mass on Sunday depended on more than religious education classes. Another 36% of the teachers disagreed with this position and supported the individual impact of religious education on Mass attendance. Along similar lines, 53% of the teachers agreed that one of the main aims of religious education was to promote involvement of the students in the parish, but 29% of the other teachers disagreed and 18% were unsure if religious education should have promotion of parish involvement as a major aim.

### *Prayer and Meditation in Religious Education*

A majority of the teachers' responses (83%) agreed that the students should have the experience of meditation in religious education classes, while the other 17% of teachers were not sure if this was desirable. Offering a range of different prayer practices to the students was preferred by most (94%) of the teachers. Eighty-three percent of the responding teachers expected students to learn traditional prayers of the Christian tradition while the 17% of teachers were unsure of this expectation

### *Summary*

In summary, the teachers expected that religious education teachers should be witnesses to the Catholic faith, they did not expect religious education to increase parish Mass attendance and they did expect the Catholic sacraments to be offered to the students. The teachers were generally divided on the impact of religious education on the students' commitment to their faith, but they did have the expectation of meditation, learning a variety of prayers including traditional Christian prayers.

### *Status of Religious Education as an Academic Subject*

Table 6.5 provides a summary of the responses by the teachers to statements related to how religious education was perceived as an academic subject.

*Table 6.5 Teacher views on the status of religious education as an academic subject*

		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)
B33	RE – assessment like other subjects	0	12	90
B34	Test students on knowledge of Catholic – Christian faith	12	12	77
B35	RE – academically challenging as other subjects	0	6	94
B36	RE – homework	6	41	53
B37	Parents should be involved in RE homework	6	35	59

B38	VCE RE in 10-12 increases academic status of RE	6	18	76
B39	Yr 11-12 should study at least 1 VCE RE subject	6	12	83
B40	11-12 should have a more Catholic subject included	12	65	24
B41	RE status is low in student opinion	6	12	83
B42	RE status is low in parent opinion	18	35	47

### *The Academic Nature of Religious Education*

The data indicated that nearly all of the teachers (94%) agreed that religious education should be as academically challenging as the other subjects offered at the same year levels. Similarly, most of the teachers (90%) agreed that the assessment tasks at each level should be like those of every other subject. On the question of the status of religious education in the eyes of students, the teachers generally (83%) agreed that most students rate it with low status. When asked whether the status of religious education was generally low in the opinion of the parents, only 18% of the teachers believed that the parents rated it highly, with 47% of the teachers agreeing that the parents would give religious education low status, and 35% of the teachers who were unsure of where parents rated religious education as an academic subject. A majority of the teachers (76%) agreed that having a VCE accredited subject in the senior levels of the school raised the academic status of religious education at these levels. In light of this, 83% of the teachers responded that all students in Years 11 and 12 should study at least one VCE religious education unit in that time. The majority of the teachers (65%) were uncertain whether the students in Years 11 and 12 should be offered a different unit of religious education which was specifically ‘more Catholic’ than the current VCE units. Minority groups of the teachers agreed (24%) and disagreed (12%) with the ‘more Catholic’ option for religious education.

### *Religious Education and Assessment*

The data revealed that most of the teachers (77%) agreed that the students should be tested on their knowledge of the Catholic faith and traditions. This figure far surpassed the 12%

who disagreed. Small majorities of the teachers agreed that, firstly, religious education should have homework (59%); and, secondly, that the parents should be involved in homework (53%). Only 6% of the teachers disagreed with each of these propositions

### *Summary*

In summary, in responding to the questionnaire, the teachers generally agreed that religious education should be on an equal academic footing with other subjects at all year levels. They supported at least one VCE religious studies unit at Years 11 and 12, but did not show majority support for a ‘more Catholic’ unit at years 11 and 12. Approximately half the teachers had the expectation of homework and that parents would participate in the homework. Teachers also saw as worthy the testing of the students’ knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition.

### *Religious Education, Personal Faith and the Search for Meaning*

Table 6.6 summarises the responses of the teachers to questionnaire statements concerned with the perceptions of religious education in terms of students’ spiritual and faith development as they attempt to search for meaning in their lives.

*Table 6.6 Teacher views on the relationship between religious education, personal faith and the search for meaning*

		Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)
B43	RE – think about meaning and purpose in life	0	0	100
B44	RE- use Catholic tradition to construct personal meaning	0	0	100
B45	RE – enhance spirituality without reference to local parish involvement	0	0	100
B46	RE – help develop spirituality of students	0	0	100
B47	RE – help develop personal faith	0	6	94
B48	Familiar with Catholic tradition – for personal faith later in life	0	12	89

The data from the questionnaires identified that the teachers were in complete agreement that the religious education curriculum should help the students to think about the meaning and purpose of life. They also unanimously agreed that religious education should help the students to draw on the Catholic tradition in constructing their own personal meaning. The teachers were also in unanimous agreement that religious education should enhance the spirituality of the students whether or not these students become active members of a Church community. There was almost complete support (94%) among the teachers for religious education helping the students to develop their own personal faith. The vast majority of the teachers (88%) also agreed that religious education should help the students to become familiar with the Catholic tradition in order that they may develop a personal Christian faith later in life.

### Conclusion

Overall, the teachers were experienced religious education teachers who enjoyed their role, with approximately half having academic qualifications in the field of religious education. These teachers hoped that religious education would enhance the spiritual growth of the students and they supported religious education homework. Assessment of religious education knowledge, and teaching a VCE religious studies unit to all were seen as desirable but not necessarily that a 'more Catholic' unit should be offered at that level. The teachers expected religious education teachers to be witnesses to the Catholic faith and to provide a wide range of prayer experiences. Half of the teachers knew a lot about *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and most were familiar with SCP. There was support for religious education at all year levels, and most teachers agreed on the need to teach about the Church in its past and present. The data also highlighted support for moral teaching but not memorisation of moral codes, while contemporary biblical scholarship was

expected along with the study of different faiths. Community service, social justice and the skills to evaluate society were strongly supported by the teachers. The teachers saw the need for the students to express their views on issues, but the teachers challenged the view that the parents knew much about what happened in religious education classes. Most of the teachers thought that the use of 'Church' language was not helpful to the parents and approximately half of the teachers thought that text books would better inform parents about the Catholic tradition. Knowledge of the Catholic tradition was viewed as valuable for students to create meaning in life, even in later life.

### The Teacher Interviews

The tables presented in this section present the teachers' responses to questions collated in relation to common themes. With most of the questions, a few responses were shared by many of the teachers and there was also a wide range of other responses. The frequency, not percentages, of responses by the religious education teachers is given in brackets. Interviews were conducted with 14 teachers.

#### *Parent Involvement with the School and Religious Education*

This section of the chapter deals with the perceptions of teachers about parent involvement in religious education. It also examines teacher views on the benefits of parents having a better understanding of the religious education curriculum and then becoming more actively supportive of religious education in the school. There is also data on teacher perceptions of how the school communicates with parents. Table 6.7 summarises the responses by teachers on how they viewed the involvement of parents in the school and in religious education.

*Table 6.7 The views of the teachers on parent involvement with the school and religious education*

Few males completed questionnaires – why?	No surprise (10); females attend P/T interviews (9); local females have general education role (9); females – nurturers, males – providers (8); females take lead in P/T interviews (3); this response was not expected to be so strong (2); females are more Church oriented – RE seen as part of this (2); associated with personal faith (1); unsure (1); males care but not involved (1)
Parents’ difficulty with ecclesiastical constructs in RE language	The parents lack knowledge of RE (12); the teachers need to keep language simple (11); the parents know little Church language/unchurched (10); the parents intimidated (8); the teachers need to avoid assumptions of parent knowledge (6); avoid ‘conversion’ link to RE (5); need for parent education in RE language (5); clarity with students helps the parents (4); the parents still in primary school RE language (4); the teachers use simple language (4); the parents have no interest (3); school and home language different (3); no surprise (3); impacts on lack of support for RE (3); the teachers don’t always know language (2); surprised (2); private school rather than Catholic (1); RE not discussed at home (1); little time for RE documents at home (1); the teachers don’t read RE documents (1); the parents don’t get chance to hear the language often (1)
Why the parents do not want input into RE	Value the teachers as experts (11); ‘out of their depth’/feel inferior (10); feel they have little to contribute (7); feel low knowledge and background (7); same as other subjects (6); leave the religion thing to someone else (6); RE partnership with home not happening (6); private school not for RE (4); expect RE to be same as for the parents (4); no Church involvement (4); sends negative message to students and school (4) need to educate the parents (4) the teachers feel put down (3); fear of evangelisation/intimacy (3); happy with no RE (2); no time (2); a challenge in engaging the parents (2); hostile to RE (1); too much change (1); the teachers feel the parents ascribe little value to the Catholic tradition (1); no impact on RE curriculum (1); little student knowledge of family religion (1); impact – forces the teachers to make RE more appealing (1)
Benefits of better parent understanding of RE	Support and encouragement of students (9); students take RE more seriously (9); the teachers feel supported (8); greater involvement in school and religion (4); raise relevance of RE – higher academic profile (4); improve communication with the parents (4); difficult due to fear of involvement (3); adult education most important (3); school and family together is important (2); not sure (2); similar to other subjects (2)

Reasons for small amount of teacher contact with the parents	Minimal contact (10); usually discipline, late work (10); few of the parents attend P/T interviews (9); similar to most subjects (9); females usually respond to home contact (6); low homework expectations – low need to contact (3); teacher avoids contact where possible (1); major contact with teacher is in parish (1)
Response to parents rating RE as part of their choice of secondary school	Lack of evidence to support (14); concern re truth of this (12); school replacing the parents as educators in faith (6); values and discipline, not RE (6); if true it is affirming for RE teachers (5); the parents use school to replace Church involvement (4); the parents' support is important (4); low parent value of RE reflected in students (2); RE linked to pastoral care, ethos (2); school is an alternative to the government school (1); RE offers 'sense of the beyond' (1); the parents support encourage best in the teachers (1)
Response to parents attaching high value to RE	Some definitely do but many do not (11); student low value of RE reflects the parents (9); frustrating (6); little talk/practice of religion at home (6); low parent-teacher interviews (4); RE is non-vocational (4); the teachers do their best for those who value RE (4); many parent link RE to ethos and environment (4); 'private school' choice degrades RE (3); some value RE but do not show this (3); low understanding of RE among general staff (2); some staff no value for RE (1)
Why might parents rate newsletters and website as the best ways of communicating about RE	Electronic is 'our world today' (8); no surprise (6); easy access in busy lives (6); regular RE input in newsletters informs the parents (6); usual contact with the parents is negative (4); people prefer face to face (3); the teachers prefer phone or interview (1); can be easily disregarded (1); face to face can be confronting/accountable (1); electronic not good for dialogue / good for information (1); electronic can stifle community building (1); lack of time for RE (1); lack of commitment by the parents (1)

### *The Gender of Respondents*

The data in provided in Table 6.7 indicates that most of the teachers of religious education (10) were not surprised with the questionnaire findings that showed that few males completed the questionnaires. The teachers identified a similar gender imbalance in parent-teacher interviews and in other contact by parents with the school, in relation to religious education, with females being the only parent represented on most occasions. The teachers who were interviewed believed that the predominant female parent

involvement in RE was reflective of local females being the primary parent involved in educational matters irrespective of the aspect of school life being discussed (9). It was strongly suggested by the teachers that the females accepted the nurturer's role while many males maintained a role as provider, leaving females to attend to the schooling needs of the children (8).

Some of the teachers noted that even when both of the parents attended educational interviews, that it was often the female who initiated discussions and responses (3). Small numbers of the teachers believed that females, generally, were more involved in the Church and this led to the female involvement with religious education. Some teachers also indicated that the male parents might have cared about religious education but did not become involved. A small number of the teachers also suggested that a lack of personal faith in males may have affected the figures.

#### *Parents and Specialized Language*

Most of the teachers who were interviewed (13) and the majority of the parents who completed the questionnaires (76%) believed that the parents were uncomfortable with the use of specialized religious education language. One of the key reasons given by the teachers was that the parents had little, if any, knowledge or background in religious education and its particular vocabulary (12). This was reinforced in the data from the teachers' questionnaires which showed that all teachers were either unsure whether parents had 'good' knowledge of religious education or whether the parents' knowledge of religious education was limited. The teachers associated this limited knowledge with the parents having minimal 'Church' language (10) due to a lack of attendance at traditional liturgies and parish involvements. The teachers, generally, saw this lack of knowledge of this language influencing the need for the religious education teachers to keep the language

used in interviews within a range suited to the limited parent exposure to the language often used to discuss religious education (11).

During the interviews it was agreed by the teachers that the possibility of being confronted or intimidated (8) by 'religious' language was a strong factor in keeping the parents away from interviews about religious education. The teachers also saw a possible link between the language of well-known media evangelists and the parents' perceptions of the language of religious education. Small numbers of the teachers responded that the parents were still only familiar with the religious language of their own primary religious education, and therefore this also justified the teachers simplifying the language used in discussion about religious education with parents. The teachers believed that the school needed to educate the parents about some of the specialised language and concepts of religious education and that there was a need for the teachers to make the language used in classes clear to students so that they could communicate it at home. Some of the teachers also believed that most of the parents had no interest in religious education, and that the lack of understanding of religious education language could have a negative impact on the support given by parents to religious education in their homes.

#### *Parents and Involvement in Religious Education*

The questionnaire data provided by the parents indicated that the parents did not want to make more of a contribution to the religious education curriculum at the school. In response to this data, the teachers generally agreed (11) that the parents probably valued the teachers at the school as the 'experts' in religious education and that the parents believed that they were 'out of their depth' (10) with little to contribute due to a lack of knowledge and little background in the subject matter (7). This was supported by the finding that some of the teachers thought that the parents expected religious education to be the same as it was for

them when they were at school. Some of the teachers also thought that the parents may not want involvement in religious education because the parents wanted someone else to inform their children about religion. The teachers expressed the view that many parents were not actively engaged in religious communities, and were not prepared to teach their own children about religion.

Many of the teachers wanted, but did not experience, religious education to be a partnership between home and school, and that leaving the teaching about religion to the teachers was not creating this desired partnership. Other teachers thought that the parent contribution to religious education was similar to that in other subjects where parent contribution was limited. The teachers also made reference to the parents having a low regard for religious education, seeing it as not an important part of the choice of this school. Some teachers believed that a fear of proselytization distanced some of the parents from involvement in religious education. Small numbers of the teachers also suggested that the low parental contribution to religious education sent negative messages about religious education to the students and to the school. Some of the teachers also believed that the parents did not want to be involved in the religious education curriculum in case it demanded a response from them, as religion was not a part of the parents' contemporary lifestyles. The teachers also said that they felt let down by the lack of parental support.

#### *Religious Education as an Important Factor in Selecting a School for Students*

In response to the parents' questionnaire data which showed that most parents said that religious education was an important part of the selection of this school for their children, the teachers who took part in the interviews were unanimous in their agreement that there was a lack of evidence to support this claim by parents. The majority of the teachers

questioned the truth of this parental claim, with some of the teachers believing that the school was being called upon to replace the parents as educators in faith, and to replace the family Church involvement. Other teacher interviewees believed that the parents primarily wanted Catholic or Christian values and strong discipline rather than, as they stated, having religious education as a priority. It was affirming for some of the teachers to know that the parents may really value religious education, as the teachers agreed that parental support was important in teaching religious education.

Other responses by the teachers included the observation that the lack of apparent value given to religious education by the parents was reflected in the classroom attitudes of the students. The teachers also believed that many of the parents linked religious education with the lived ethos of the school, and that the parents wanted a sense of the sacred which the parents saw religious education providing. A view put forward in the teacher interviews was that the Catholic school provided one of the few experiences of 'Church' for the students, that for some of the families the school was simply a private alternative to the government schools and that religious education was accepted as a necessary, but not essential, part of being at the school.

In the interviews, the teachers were asked to respond with their reactions to the finding from the parents' data where only 2% of the parents said that they did not value religious education. A majority of the teachers agreed that some of the parents, a minority, definitely valued religious education. The teachers' questionnaire data showed that there were similar numbers of teachers who were unsure of whether the parents valued religious education (47%) as there were numbers of teachers who thought that parents did value religious education (41%). There was a general agreement in the teachers' interview data that the perceived lack of interest in religious education from students was directly related to a lack of parental interest in religious education. Some of the teachers

expressed their frustration at this perceived lack of support from the parents. A number of the teachers argued that there was a lack of discussion about religious education and practice of religion at home, and this did not create a positive attitude towards religious education in the school. Some of the teachers said that they, the teachers, continued to do their best despite the perceived lack of interest from parents, teaching religious education for the sake of those families who did value religious education.

#### *Parent-Teacher Interviews as an Indicator of Parent Interest in Religious Education*

Low numbers at religious education parent-teacher interviews indicated to some of the teachers that many parents did not have an interest in religious education. The interview data showed that some of the teachers believed that the parents linked religious education with the ethos and environment of the school, and valued this link rather than valuing the curriculum, while other interviewees believed that the perceived non-vocational nature of religious education was a devaluing factor in the eyes of parents. A small number of the teachers expressed opinions that the parents' choice of a 'private' school downgraded the religious education of the school, and that a low understanding of religious education among staff generally did not help the profile of religious education with the parents.

#### *Means of Communication with Parents*

In response to the questionnaires, most of the parents expressed the view that electronic communication including email and use of the school website was the preferred mode of contact with the home. Approximately half of the teachers interviewed said that the parents and the school were in an electronic age, and that the flexibility and immediacy of electronic communication of newsletters, email and websites suited this lifestyle and the expectations of parents. The easy access of email and websites was acknowledged by

some of the teachers as valuable in the parents' busy lives. There was an agreement by some of the teachers that the weekly religious education content in the school newsletters was a valuable contribution to the communication with parents about religious education, while other teachers acknowledged that the usual contact with the parents was about negative matters like behaviour and poor work.

Other interview data indicated that many of the teachers preferred phone or interview contact with the parents, while other teachers preferred face to face contact. The data showed that emails sent to parents could be easily discarded by parents, but face to face discussions with teachers could be confronting and force accountability. Some of the teachers expressed the view that electronic communication could be good for information sharing, but was not so suited for dialogue with the parents, as the electronic forms of communication can stifle community building when the personal contact is removed. It was advocated by teachers that this lack of personal contact between school and home could lead to a lack of time for religious education and a lack of commitment by the parents to religious education.

### *Content of Religious Education*

This section of the chapter deals with the perceptions of the teachers about how they and the parents understood the content of the religious education curriculum.

*Table 6.8 Teacher views on the content of religious education*

Teacher response to some of the parents wanting optional VCE RE	It should be compulsory in Years 7-12 (14); not surprised by the response (9); lack of perceived relevance of RE from the parents (8); VCE seen as time for 'real' subjects (7); senior years about academic scores (6); current VCE RE balanced and beneficial (6) ; value of RE needs to be better presented (5); RE lessens VCE choices (4) Catholic education about more than academic (4) senior students more ready for depth in RE (3); 7-12 RE is an advantage of the school (3); optional VCE RE could affect other years (2); reflects where Church is at (2);
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	<p>school-based RE would lower academic perception of RE (2); the parents valuing RE leads to high academic expectations (2); pre-VCE RE enough in eyes of the parents (1); the parents want more choice (1); greater value for RE if knowledge is emphasised more (1); the teachers want classroom RE at all levels (1); no RE at senior level would affect student involvement in Church generally (1); this response disappoints teacher (1); value of VCE RE often not seen till later in life (1)</p>
<p>Teacher response to some of the parents wanting optional VCE RE</p>	<p>It should be compulsory in Years 7-12 (14); not surprised by the response (9); lack of perceived relevance of RE from the parents (8); VCE seen as time for 'real' subjects (7); senior years about academic scores (6); current VCE RE balanced and beneficial (6); value of RE needs to be better presented (5); RE lessens VCE choices (4) Catholic education about more than academic (4) senior students more ready for depth in RE (3); 7-12 RE is an advantage of the school (3); optional VCE RE could affect other years (2); reflects where Church is at (2); school-based RE would lower academic perception of RE (2); the parents valuing RE leads to high academic expectations (2); pre-VCE RE enough in eyes of the parents (1); the parents want more choice (1); greater value for RE if knowledge is emphasised more (1); the teachers want classroom RE at all levels (1); no RE at senior level would affect student involvement in Church generally (1); this response disappoints teacher (1); value of VCE RE often not seen till later in life (1)</p>
<p>Should RE teach about multiple religious traditions?</p>	<p>Focus should primarily on Catholic (10); minor attention to other faiths (9); by Yr 12 other faiths should be covered (9); diverse knowledge leads to harmony (7); learn from others, new perspectives (6); challenges Catholics – aware of others (5); need values/spirituality and theology (4); little knowledge of own tradition (4); inclusive for all students (3); minorities need to be heard (2); unsure of diversity in curriculum (2); hard to achieve diversity in curriculum (1); other religions – minor goal of RE (1); models needed from within traditions (1)</p>
<p>Should RE teach about morality in RE?</p>	<p>Extremely important (14); for development of whole person (12); building relationships and treating others (11); common for all people (4); theology into practice (3); pathways/values for life (3); specific units at each level (3); Jesus as model for action (2); option to society (1); beyond knowledge only (2); needs quality teachers (1); needed for specific issues (1); to give youth direction 'back' (1)</p>
<p>Should RE teach for spiritual development?</p>	<p>Extremely important (13); whole self (6); opens student to spirituality (5); provide a framework for spirituality (5); need in crisis (4); more than knowing about God – relationships (4); development hard to judge (4); what is spirituality? (4); developmental stages (4); replace/support family (3); the teachers cannot control development (2);</p>

	impact may be delayed (2) ; suited to RE Art (2); confusion between religion and spirituality (2); balance between aspects of personal development (1); spiritual undervalued in RE (1); students too young (1); by Yr 12 the teachers can see change (1); very difficult for school (1)
Should RE evaluate the values and practices of contemporary society?	Need to examine change and its effects in society (9); important / essential (12); need to compare Catholic and non-Christian values in society (6); RE only place to compare spiritual/identity issues and other values in society (3); incidental not intentional (1); implicit rather than explicit (1); don't know how do this (1); all curriculum should do this (1)
Should RE be aiming to develop a knowledge and appreciation of what is sacred in religion?	Very important (11); RE has definite role teaching about sacred (10); most students receptive (10); develops over time (10) ; increasing number who have no knowledge of sacred (8); chapel visits good (7); need to link religious sacred with sacred in society (7); most respect Bible (6); Mass elicits respect for sacred (6); important to explain why sacred (5); need regular use of sacred space (5); teacher is most important (4); link family sacred story, space, rituals with religion (4); need rituals to introduce sacred (4); need sequential development (3); very difficult (3); sacred terms not common (3); Bible – need to link to daily life (3); family respect for sacred reflected in student (2) ; media attention to sacred sites, etc (1); younger students more sense of sacred (1) need formal use of space – quiet, reflective (1); the teachers at different levels (1); the teachers can do harm if not prepared (1); current interest in spiritual/sacred linked to insecurity (1); Mass is not entertainment; reverential (1); participation in sacred space and ritual leads to appreciation of sacred in general (1)

### *Compulsory Religious Education in the Secondary School*

The data collected from the teachers in the interviews and questionnaires indicated that 100% of the teachers were in agreement that religious education should be compulsory in Years 7- 10. The questionnaire data showed that most of the teachers (65%) supported compulsory Years 11 and 12 religious education, but 24% supported optional religious education at these levels. In the interviews, 100% of the teachers supported Years 11 and 12 religious education. This showed a discrepancy between the questionnaire data and interview data on this issue of optional Years 11 and 12 religious education. The higher

figure for optional religious education in the questionnaires may have been the result of their anonymous nature. The majority of the interviewed teachers were not surprised that most of the parents disagreed with compulsory Year 11 and 12 religious education. Many of the teachers believed that the parent support for optional religious education at the senior levels of the school was based in a perceived lack of academic relevance for the subject at this level. Half of the teachers agreed that the majority of the parents believed that these years at school were a time for 'real' subjects and that the parents believed that the focus at these year levels should be on academic scores. Some of the teachers offered the view that the parents saw religious education as lessening the choices of subjects available to the students in their final years of secondary school.

The interview data showed that some of the teachers maintained that the current Years 11 and 12 religious education curriculum was balanced and beneficial to all of the senior students. The data also showed awareness among the teachers of the need to improve the efforts of the school to convince the parents of the value of religious education, and this was supported by those teachers who emphasised that Catholic education is concerned with more than just academic development. The interview data provided a range of other comments by the teachers about the parent support of optional religious education at Years 11 and 12, including the observation that the senior students were ready for a more academically and personally challenging approach to religious education at this stage of their lives. Some of the teachers agreed that it was an advantage for the school to have Years 7-12 religious education and that the introduction of optional religious education at any levels could affect the efforts of teachers and the involvement of the students at the other year levels.

Some teachers believed that the parents' data reflected the position of the Church and the relationship of people with it in Australia today. These teachers were concerned

that the Church had neglected its role in adult faith education to the point where many of the parents, and some of the teachers, did not actively participate in Church on an ongoing basis. These teachers expressed the view that many parents and teachers did not take Church teaching into account, or were unaware of Church teaching on many contemporary issues due to a lack of connection with the Church. A number of teachers considered that school-based religious education would further lower the academic perception of religious education in the school and that steps taken to raise the value given to religious education would lead to higher academic expectations of religious education by parents and students. The interviewees also declared that the curriculum offered in Years 7-10 was enough religious education in the eyes of many of the parents who wanted their children to have more choice about subjects at Years 11 and 12. Some of the teachers who were interviewed were of the opinion that there would be greater valuing of religious education from parents if there was greater knowledge among parents about the content of the curriculum especially at the senior levels.

The data also showed that there were small numbers of teachers who wanted to increase the amount of classroom religious education at Years 11 and 12, while other teachers believed that having no religious education at senior level would affect the Church generally with fewer students becoming involved in the Church. In the interviews some teachers offered the view that the true value of senior school religious education was often not seen until later in life when life experiences could be related to the students' religious education experiences.

#### *Teaching about Non-Catholic Religious Traditions in Religious Education*

The data from the teachers' interviews and questionnaire indicated that the majority of religious education teachers agreed that teaching about non-Catholic religious traditions

was an important element of the religious education curriculum of the school. The interview data showed that most of the teachers believed that the Catholic faith tradition should be the main focus of religious education but that study of other main world religions was an important, although minor, aspect of the curriculum. The combination of values, spirituality and theology were seen by some as essential elements of teaching about the Catholic tradition. The questionnaire and interview data showed that most teachers considered that teaching about a range of faith traditions would help students to become more accepting of other religious traditions, and that the students would also better appreciate their own religious tradition through this comparative study. The interviewees indicated that they believed that there were many students who had little knowledge of their own Catholic tradition. The building of greater harmony at school and within society, and the development of new perspectives among the students would come from this multi-religion study.

The data showed that there were teachers who considered that religious education needed to be inclusive for all students, so that minorities could be heard and so that these smaller groups could feel respected and valued by the school and by other students. The interview responses identified that some teachers were unsure about the religious diversity in the curriculum, and acknowledged that it was difficult to address significant diversity within the religious education curriculum, but that the process would be helped by having suitable role models for the religious traditions, including Catholic.

### *Teaching about Morality in Religious Education*

The data from the questionnaires and the interviews showed that the teachers agreed on the extreme importance of teaching about morality in religious education. Most of the teachers believed that this was an essential part of the development of the whole person

beyond a focus on self, and as a key factor in helping students in the building of relationships. This included attention to supporting justice in human relationships, as morality was seen as common to all people and as the way to put theology into practice. Morality was associated with pathways or values for life, and as such the teachers considered that moral development should be addressed in specific units at each of the year levels. In responding to the questionnaires, the teachers unanimously agreed that the students should be taught about right and wrong from the perspective of the Catholic tradition, including knowledge of Catholic moral values. The teachers were more interested in students developing an understanding of how to apply values and moral principles than they were in having students memorise moral codes. An emphasis on the presentation of Jesus as a moral role model was advocated by some of the teachers, as was the need for religious education to offer moral guidance as a way of giving young people direction in life and helping them to learn how to evaluate practical moral decisions that they will encounter.

#### *Religious Education and Spiritual Development in Students*

The data from the questionnaires showed unanimous agreement by the teachers that religious education should assist in the spiritual development of the students, and that this spiritual growth should be encouraged irrespective of whether or not the students become active members of local religious communities. The interview data supported this finding, as the teachers agreed that it was extremely important that religious education should offer opportunities for spiritual development. In the interviews, the vast majority of the teachers expressed this support through a range of responses which confirmed that religious education should have a key role in helping students to identify and deal with spiritual issues. The teachers believed that religious education should open the students to the idea

of spirituality as part of the development of the whole person, including their sense of self and self-worth, as well as assisting the students in developing a sense of purpose in life. The teachers agreed that there was a need to provide a suitable environment to allow this spiritual development to occur, and some of the teachers believed that spirituality was important for the students to help them through times of crisis in their lives. The interviewees identified that there was a need to extend the understanding of spirituality beyond knowledge about God to include relationships with creation, relationships with others and relationship with God. The teachers acknowledged the difficulty of teaching for spiritual growth and assessing the spiritual development of students.

It was identified in the interviews that spiritual development needed to begin early, with opportunities for growth over time through activities suitable for the students' current level of development. Some of the teachers also expressed the view that religious education needed to support the traditional role of the family in spiritual development, with experiences of prayer and quiet time being suggested as possible ways of offering opportunities for this growth. Some further teacher comments included that the teachers could not control the spiritual development of the students, and some teachers added that the desired spiritual growth may not take place until later in life. The unit, *Religious Art*, which at the time the interviews were conducted was being offered at Years 11 and 12, was deemed to be highly suitable to spiritual development, as it allowed students to explore creative responses to religious concepts using personal reflection and interpretation within an artistic mode.

It was noted by some teachers that there was confusion between the terms 'religion' and 'spirituality' and that there needed to be a balance between the aspects of personal development such as the physical, emotional and spiritual. Some teachers expressed the view that the religious education curriculum was currently undervaluing the

spiritual development of students, but other teachers believed that students were too young to cope with the spiritual concepts which were ‘over their heads’. Some teachers observed that by the time the students were in Year 12 that it was possible to notice changes in regard to their spiritual development.

### *Religious Education and Learning to Critique the Values and Behaviours in Contemporary Society*

The data from the questionnaires showed that the teachers saw a definite role for religious education in helping the students to learn to critique values and behaviour in contemporary society. Most of the interviewed teachers agreed that this was important, as there was a need to examine change and its effects on society generally and on individuals within society. Many of the interviewed teachers also believed that there was a need for the students to be able to compare Catholic values with the secular values present in society. It was the view of some of the teachers that the religious education curriculum was the only place for this process of evaluating social and contemporary values. Other teachers said that this critiquing would happen incidentally or implicitly but not as part of an intentional process. Some teachers didn’t know how to go about this critiquing, while other teachers believed that the process should take place in all aspects of the school curriculum, not just in religious education.

### *Religious Education and the Development of a Sense of the Sacred*

The data from the teachers’ questionnaires supported the aim of religious education to provide opportunities for the development of an understanding of the sacred. Most of the interviewed teachers believed that this was very important and agreed that religious education had a definite role in teaching about the sacred. A majority of the interviewees

believed that most students were receptive when introduced to the concepts of sacred space and symbols, but that an increasing number, a majority, of students were arriving at the school without awareness of sacred space and sacred ritual. Many of the teachers believed that there was a need to link religious sacred space to what is held sacred in the more general society, and also to show the connection between religious sacred rituals and stories with what is sacred in family practices and stories. The development of a sense of the sacred was seen by the majority of the teachers as a process to be encouraged over time. It was advocated by the teachers that rituals were needed to introduce sacred space, sacred texts, and other dimensions of the sacred and that regular use of sacred space and texts would help foster this appreciation of the sacred. School and class Masses were seen as good experiences that would elicit respect for the sacredness of the ritual and space, while the teachers acknowledged the importance of the religious education teacher in this process of introducing and developing a value for the sacred in Catholic tradition.

*Further Aspects of the Nature and Purpose of Religious Education*

In the interviews, the teachers commented on their perceptions of how they and the parents viewed Religious education, the role of the teacher as a witness to the Catholic faith and the possible optional student attendance at liturgies.

*Table 6.9: teacher views on further aspects of the nature and purpose of religious education*

Should RE be less academic than other subjects?	Less academic would mean less value (13) more academic means higher response (8) need balance of personal and academic (6) some essential content (4) RE aligned with educational standards (3) less academic is harder to teach/less interesting (3)the parents want values rather than religion (3) if the parents have low interest in RE why interest in assessment (2) less academic would make more negative from students (2) RE important no matter how academic (2) RE about helping fit into community (2)the parents not engaged in society and RE (2) less academic may be more pastoral (2) low parent knowledge of purpose of RE (2) less academic would mean change to RE (1) less
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	academic may mean less value in general staff (1) RE Art seen as less academic like other art (1)
Should the teachers be witnesses to the Catholic tradition?	RE the teachers must be examples (11) role models connect with students (11) very important (10) RE teacher must have commitment to Catholic faith (10) knowledge is not enough (8) building relationship with Jesus needs witness (5) being Catholic give 'feel' for 'big picture' (5) teacher personal story adds value to RE (5) unknown impact of witness – some later feedback good (4) no need for Catholic or witness to faith (3) non-Catholic may lead to lack of contact with tradition (3) teacher needs to be 'into' RE and want to teach it (3) good knowledge not necessarily faith (2) RE helps to build teacher faith (2) see different response to non-Catholic teacher (1) all the teachers in school should witness to Catholic faith (1)
Should students be expected to attend all liturgical celebrations of the school?	Expectation that all students attend all liturgies(13); enrolment policy must be explicit about attendance(13); Catholic liturgy is integral to school (12); respect for Catholic traditions (9); not about conversion (7); optional attendance would pressure Catholics to not attend (7); clear expectations removes challenges to attendance (3); logistics of non-attendance are enormous (2); liturgy is an opportunity to evangelise (2); there is a lack of religious reasons for non-attendance (1); need to prepare students better for liturgies (1); liturgy shows faith in life (1); need to make liturgy relevant to students (1); the parents don't attend so they and students don't care (1)

### *The Academic Nature of Religious Education*

The data provided in Table 6.9 showed that\_virtually all the teachers interviewed agreed that making the religious education curriculum less academic would also lower the value of religious education in the eyes of most of the students and parents. This found resonance in the data displayed in Table 6.5 earlier in this chapter, which showed that 94% of the teachers who completed the questionnaires believed that religious education should be as academically challenging as any other subject in the school curriculum. The questionnaire data also indicated that 90% of the teachers were of the opinion that religious education should have similar assessment standards to other subjects. The

interview data also showed that more than half of the teachers agreed that higher academic standards brought about a more committed response from the students.

Some of the teachers interviewed responded that religious education should be aligned with the current educational standards, and others believed that a less academic curriculum would be harder to teach and would be less interesting for students and the teachers. One of the teachers replied in the interview that lowering the academic approach would require major rewriting of the curriculum, while another teacher thought that lowering the academic standards might lower the value of religious education in the eyes of the staff who did not teach the subject. One quarter of the respondents agreed that the religious education curriculum should have some essential content, and other teachers said that religious education would always be of importance no matter how it was framed from an academic perspective. Some the teachers thought that the parents who had little knowledge of the religious education curriculum would not know the value of the academic nature of the subject. It was also advocated that the unit *Religious Art* had a low academic profile as did other art, physical education, performing arts subjects and a number of other subjects which were traditionally labelled as 'non-academic'.

A number of the teachers who were interviewed expressed the desire for a balance between addressing academic standards and providing for the personal needs of students in the religious education sessions. This aligned with the response by some of the teachers that the parents wanted values rather than religious content as the key focus of religious education. A small number of the teachers responded that a less academic approach may allow for a more pastorally relevant one, and similar numbers of the teachers agreed that religious education had strong links to pastoral care and should be helping students to fit into community living.

### *The Role of the Teacher of Religious Education as a Witness to the Catholic Faith*

The majority of teacher responses in the interviews affirmed the role of the teacher as a witness to the Catholic faith, and as an example to the students, the parents and to their fellow teachers. The data from the teachers' questionnaires showed that the majority of the teachers (82%) agreed that religious education teachers should be witnesses to the Catholic faith. This was confirmed by a majority of the interviewed teachers who indicated that the teacher was a role-model connecting with the students on a moral and religious level. Most of the teachers stated that this role of the teacher was a very important one within the classroom and school. The majority of teacher responses from the interviews advocated that the religious education teacher must have a commitment to the Catholic faith, and that having sound knowledge of the material being taught was not enough. In contrast with this, two of the teachers believed that a good knowledge of the material being covered, and not necessarily faith, was sufficient. Some the teachers also thought that there was no need for the teacher to be Catholic or to be a witness to faith.

Approximately one third of the teachers interviewed expressed the view that witness to the Catholic tradition was necessary for building a relationship with Jesus which was seen as one of aims of religious education. This support for the Catholic witness of the teachers was reinforced by those teachers who believed that being Catholic gave a 'feel for the big picture' of religious education and the Catholic faith. Similar numbers of teachers responded that the personal story of the teacher added value to the teaching of the religious education content, and some of the teachers noted that the impact of the witness of the teachers was sometimes not known until much later in life when feedback showed that their example did have an impact on the students.

It was also suggested that religious education teachers needed to be involved in the whole process personally, and needed to really want to teach religious education classes

for the witness aspect to be powerful for the students. One of the teachers expressed the view that all staff, not just the religious education teachers, should be witnesses to the Catholic faith. There was a view expressed by some of the interviewees that being non-Catholic may lead to a lack of connection with the tradition personally, and that this may lead to the students not getting this connection to the faith. Teaching religious education was seen by a small number of the teachers as helping to develop the personal faith of the teacher and that faith was then lived as witness for the students.

### *Compulsory Attendance of Students at Liturgies*

The vast majority of the teachers who participated in the interviews and a similar percentage of those who completed the questionnaires agreed that there should be an expectation that all students attend all school and class liturgies. Similar numbers of the interviewed teachers said that this should be made explicit in the enrolment process, with some interviewees indicating that such clear expectations removed arguments for non-attendance. The view that Catholic liturgy is integral to the nature of the school was proposed by most the teachers who were interviewed, with a majority indicating that liturgical attendance was an important way of showing respect for Catholic tradition. Half of the interviewed teachers agreed that liturgy attendance was not concerned with trying to convert students to Catholicism, while some saw the liturgy as an opportunity to evangelise the students and the parents when they attended liturgies during the year. Half of those interviewed agreed that allowing optional liturgy attendance for the non-Catholic students would create an opportunity for some Catholic students to challenge attendance. It was highlighted by two of the teachers that the logistics of catering for the non-attendees would create great difficulties for the school. Some of the interviewed teachers agreed

that there was a need for better preparation of students in religious education classes if the liturgies were to be meaningful experiences for the students.

*General Comments by Teachers about Teaching Religious Education*

Table 6.10 provides a summary of the teachers’ responses to an open-ended question inviting teachers to provide comments about any particular aspects of religious education that they believed important, but which may not have been covered in the interviews.

*Table 6.10 Some general comments by teachers about teaching religious education*

Other comments	Challenge of adapting RE to suit today’s students (4); great to see connection of theology and life (4); RE is enjoyable to teach (2); <i>Awakenings</i> gives good framework for RE (1); current RE curriculum gives good direction (1); RE offers broad development (1); RE offers breadth of approaches (1); RE Art successful (1); challenge of RE and liturgical year (1); RE is fun for teacher and student (1); welcoming RE class (1); self-discovery and social comment (1); opportunity to challenge values (1); RE should involve whole staff (1); RE is faith challenge to teacher (1); RE addresses spiritual (1); retreats and faith dialogue (2); past student feedback - help in hard times (1)
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The data in displayed in Table 6.10 shows that the most common general comments about religious education offered by the teachers, referred to the fact that there was a great challenge for teachers to adapt religious education teaching to suit the students’ contemporary lifestyles and views on life. The other equally common response was that the teachers found it gratifying when students demonstrated a connection between the theology taught in religious education classes and their lived experience. The only other multiple responses were that teaching religious education was an enjoyable experience for the teachers, and that retreats gave the opportunity for teachers and students to engage in meaningful dialogues about personal faith issues. Other comments were

generally positive in nature and reflected the teachers' desire to make their religious education classes meaningful, challenging and positive times of self-discovery for the students. The teachers expressed their satisfaction when they could see evidence of the growth of the individual students as they engaged in the content and processes of the religious education curriculum.

### Conclusion

The data from the questionnaires and interviews provided a range of insights into how the teachers of religious education, who participated in the research, believed that they and other teachers viewed various aspects of the religious education curriculum. There were 17 completed questionnaires and 14 interviews. Of these teachers, approximately half had over 10 years experience teaching religious education, while another 35% had between 2 and 5 years teaching religious education. Also, half of the teachers had a professional religious education or theology qualifications, with two at degree or masters level. Approximately half had a good knowledge of the (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum which was the mandated curriculum for the school, but 80% indicated that they had a good knowledge of the SCP methodology which was foundational to *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005). Most of the teachers enjoyed their role in religious education and most agreed that they and their fellow teachers should be witnesses to the Catholic faith as the teacher was a valued influence as a role model for students.

The teachers were divided in their perceptions of how parents valued religious education, with most interviewees indicating that there was a lack of evidence to show that parents valued the religious education curriculum. Many of the teachers believed that a lack of support for religious education at home resulted in a low value for religious education in students, but they expected an improved attitude and support from parents to

bring about improved student participation in activities. Most of the teachers believed that the low desire on behalf of parents to make a contribution to the curriculum may have been linked to low parent knowledge about religious education, which led to parents feeling inferior to the teachers who were perceived as experts. Therefore, the teachers supported greater parent education about religious education. One of the key aspects identified as unhelpful to parents in the teacher interviews was the use of theoretical and theological language, where most of the teachers found some terms unhelpful for both the parents and the teachers. About half the teachers who completed the questionnaires thought that the parents would benefit from exposure to a religious education text, but were divided on whether the parents should be involved in religious education homework. Most teachers thought that the level of involvement of parents in religious education was similar to the level of the parents' involvement in many other subjects at school.

The teachers' responses to the questionnaire revealed unanimous support for a religious education curriculum from Year 7 to Year 10, with 25% support for optional religious education at Years 11 and 12. The teacher interviews indicated unanimous support for Years 7-12 religious education, and they believed that many parents did not agree because they did not see the relevance of religious education to the academic grades in Year 12 studies, although many of the teachers agreed that the current senior school religious education curriculum was well-balanced and relevant to students' needs. The teachers also indicated unanimous support for students having opportunities to discuss personal views about issues and for the teaching of morality from a Catholic perspective. The use of Scripture was strongly supported by the teachers as was religious education addressing social justice and community service. The teachers' interviews also indicated that religious education should offer opportunities for spiritual growth, by the school providing a framework for sequential development of spirituality and respect for the sacred

in religion. Sacred liturgies were to be compulsory for all students, according to nearly all of the teachers and most of the parents. It was expected that the school would offer, where possible, appropriate experiences of the other Catholic sacraments as well.

The teachers of religious education indicated that the Catholic faith should be the main focus of the curriculum, with knowledge of the Catholic tradition to be assessed along with the history of the Catholic Church and the place of the Catholic Church in contemporary society. The teachers agreed that there should also be time given for students to learn about other faith traditions in order to foster greater awareness of these other traditions, and to encourage tolerance and respect for other traditions, but that this should be minor compared to the time devoted to the Catholic tradition.

The data showed that the teachers believed that the weekly newsletters and electronic communication were best for providing information to parents, because of the flexibility of access to the information in busy lives, but the teachers were concerned that reliance on the electronic might inhibit face to face dialogue and the building of personal relationships between parents and teachers. The data also indicated that the teachers were very supportive of religious education offering students the opportunity to develop skills to evaluate the values and practices of the electronic media and in society generally.

Religious education was given equal academic status with other subjects in the curriculum by the teachers. The teachers were concerned that perceptions that religious education was less academic would lead to less student application and interest in the subject at all year levels, especially in the senior school. The teachers also indicated that religious education needed to balance the academic and personal needs of students as they sought a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life generally, stating that this may be best appreciated by students, and their parents, after secondary school when they have the chance to apply theology and morality to lived experience.

Chapter seven compares the teacher and parent findings from the questionnaires and interviews. Particular attention is given to the areas of agreement and disagreement between the parents and teachers on issues related to religious education. There is examination of responses to compare those that reflect how the parents and teachers view the roles and attitudes of each other. Chapter seven provides an overview of issues arising from this comparison of the views of parents and teachers. This leads into Chapter eight which contains conclusions and recommendations in response to the findings examined in Chapter seven.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS OF RESPONDENTS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the relationship between the data collected in the questionnaires and interviews from the teachers of religious education, as analysed in Chapter six, and from the parents of students at the school as analysed in Chapter five. The interviews with parents and teachers were designed to examine the responses for these two groups to particular aspects of the questionnaires. This chapter provides a discussion of the similarities and differences in the responses of both groups. It sets these findings against the research questions in light of the relevant literature and considerations of the context presented in earlier chapters of this thesis.

#### Discussion of the Findings of the Questionnaires and Interviews from the Parents and the Teachers who participated in these Data Gathering Exercises

Table 7.1 examines the areas of strong agreement between the parents' and teachers' questionnaire data. It should be noted that there were far more areas of agreement than there were disagreement between the parents and the teachers in regard to the questionnaire data.

*Table 7.1 Findings of questionnaires: similarities in responses – Parents (P), Teachers (T)*

Questionnaire Item	% Agree	
	P	T
B7	Discussion of personal understanding of teachings	[94 100]
B8	Discuss relevance of Church today	[92 88]
B9	History of Christianity and Catholic Church is important	[88 88]
B14	Teaching about Jesus and his role in salvation	[81 100]

B16	RE - Community service	[90	94]
B17	RE – social justice issues	[91	100]
B21	RE – non-Christian religions traditions	[80	95]
B22	Study of other religions – greater acceptance of other religious traditions	[83	94]
B23	Study of other religions – leads to better appreciation of own tradition	[80	88]
B27	RE – traditional prayers of the Christian tradition	[68	83]
B28	RE – stories of Bible heroes	[90	83]
B29	RE – knowledge of Jesus and his teachings from the Bible	[91	100]
B46	RE – help develop spirituality of students	[88	100]
B55	Knowledge of religious conflicts and persecutions in the world today	[85	89]
B58	Completing the survey was helpful in thinking about RE	[83	89]
PQ26/TQ9	Parents expect RE to increase Mass attendance	[6	6]

#### Findings of Questionnaires which Show Differences between the Parents and the Teachers

Table 7.2 presents the areas from the questionnaires where there were differences between the responses of parents and teachers to particular items.

*Table 7.2 Findings of questionnaires: differences in responses – Parents (P), Teachers (T)*

Questionnaire Item	% Agree	
	P	T
B2 RE optional 11-12	[74	24]
B5 Non-Catholics optional Mass attendance	[24	0]
B33 RE – assessment like other subjects	[55	88]
B34 Test students on knowledge of Catholic – Christian faith	[40	77]
B35 RE – academically challenging as other subjects	[46	94]
B39 Yr 11-12 should study at least 1 VCE RE subject	[34	83]
B49 Know about SCP	[11	82]
B50 Know about <i>Awakenings</i>	[16	53]
PQ11/TQ6 Parent good knowledge of RE	[49	0]
PQ25/TQ8 Teachers have unreal expectations of RE	[20	0]
PQ32/TQ12 Help to understand RE – catechesis	[28	53]
PQ33/TQ13 Help to understand RE – evangelisation	[23	41]

PQ34/TQ14	Help to understand RE – witnessing	[31	89]
PQ35/TQ15	Help to understand RE – inculturation	[13	35]
PQ36/TQ16	Help to understand RE – ministry	[41	88]
PQ37/TQ17	Help to understand RE – mission	[41	100]
PQ38/TQ19	Terms confusing for parents	[80	78]

These tables were constructed after an analysis of the data using a Fishers collapsed 2 x 2 t-test. The Fishers collapsed 2 x 2 t-test, used because of the large difference between the number of parent and teacher responses, provided an indication of the questions listed in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 for which there was a statistically significant agreement or disagreement. While this statistical method was used to generate significance, other data was also identified in the interviews and in some questionnaire items that had relevance to the research. These additional items have been analysed in Chapters five and six and have been included in the discussion sections of this chapter as appropriate.

### Comparison of Findings from the Interviews

The interviews were conducted with a much smaller population than were the surveys. Details of the interview process were included in the relevant sections of Chapters five and six. It is to be noted that the interviews showed that those parents interviewed provided similar responses when compared with the responses of the teachers interviewed. Table 7.3 contains a summary of some of the key points raised in the interviews.

*Table 7.3 Comparison of interview responses of parents and teachers*

Parents	Teachers
Few males – females have the educational role; nurturers; males not interested or too busy	Females have the educational role; mostly females at P-T interviews; nurturers
RE language – low value – lack of confidence/knowledge; don't talk	RE language – low knowledge; need to avoid assumptions/knowledge; low

religion often; lack of relevance to daily life; little adult education; teachers custodians of language; link to televangelists	Church language and involvement; link to conversion negative; intimidated parents
Lack of parent input in RE – parental lack of knowledge, parents feel intimidated; parents react to RE like other subjects; school as experts; RE seen to have low relevance; parent apathy towards RE	Low input – teachers seen as experts; parents feel out of depth/inferior; parents think that they have little to contribute; parents react like they do in other subjects; there is no partnership with home; there is a need to educate parents; low parent input gives negative messages to students about RE
Parents feel a lack of welcome in secondary compared to primary school	Benefits of more parent input – teachers feel supported; encourages student participation; improves perceived relevance of RE; improved relationship of parents with school
RE is important as it adds to the intangible dimension of the school; value-based environment; moral and spiritual dev; social responsibility; need for general education about religion; ‘private’	Parents value RE – lack of evidence; schools left to education in faith with little home input; parents want ethos and values; discipline and environment; low student value reflects low parent value
RE in newsletter best communication; hardcopy and electronic; Little use of website; willingness to use if better informed about it	Communication – newsletters good regular; flexible; no good for building relationships/dialogue
Low interest in meetings – busy, RE low academic; parents attend only if there is a perceived need	Parent-Teacher contact – low; usually negative; low parent value of RE; usually females who contact school
Community service and social justice highly important; retreats and seminars valued by parents; moral education a high priority	Community service and social justice highly important; retreats and seminars are seen as very valuable
Optional RE at 11,12 – low academic; little value in post-secondary options; could devalue RE at other levels; time away from other subjects; lack of value of whole personal development; current RE curriculum seen to have balance; parental lack of knowledge a factor	100% support for 7-12 RE; parents lack connection between RE and post – school; optional RE would devalue RE in school; need to educate parents; RE needs to be better ‘marketed’ to parents

Catholic major; other faiths minor; tolerance	Catholic definite main focus; others incidental/minor; tolerance and harmony; challenge Catholic views; need to show value of student traditions
Moral education; making good decisions about right and wrong in society; RE only place for moral analysis and critique	Moral essential for building relationships and dev of whole person
Spiritual development opportunities expected; a light in the dark; something to come back to; fear of link to cults, etc.; time for students to become quiet and reflective	Spiritual dev opportunities essential for whole self; developmental approach; replace traditional family; sacred important; increasing numbers who know little of what is sacred; chapel and rituals good; teacher important as role model; need to link secular sacred with religious sacred
Evaluate values in society/media; living skills link; challenging materialism, consumerism; improves use of free will;	Evaluate society – essential; RE seen as the only place to compare/evaluate Catholic and other values and practices
Less academic as RE is seen to have no direct link to post-school; parents are ignorant of RE content; greater support for Years 7-11 RE as academically equal.	RE as equal academically; less academic emphasis would mean less status and response; need for a balance of personal and academic; there are some essential content and educational standards
Witness of teacher; role models; broad respect for tradition; good person rather than regular Church-attende; difficulty defining Catholic; hypocritical if not witness; concern about possible secular teacher influence; less time better than less quality	Teachers should be witness; example of Catholic faith; role models who connect students with Jesus; knowledge is not enough; need Catholic sensitivity to big picture and personal story
All students should attend liturgies; it needs to be an enrolment expectation; if optional – negative influence on religious nature of school; liturgy essential aspect of Catholic school; encouraging not forcing student participation; personal faith development opportunity; whole school liturgies noted for respect and response	All students attend liturgies; enrolment expectation; integral to Catholic school; respect for Catholic tradition; not about conversion; optional would pressure students to not attend

by students.	
	Teachers happy to teach RE; to help connect life and theology; make relevant to students

### *The Value of the Catholic School*

The data from both the parents and the teachers showed that the school was highly valued as a place of education and as a religious institution. The teachers indicated repeatedly that their work in religious education was seen as a high priority for the school and for the Catholic Church. They expressed pride in the school and its values and ethos, although they strongly questioned the commitment of the parents to the Catholic nature of the school, including the religious education program. However, the parents were consistent in their stated valuing of the school as a Catholic school and as an educational institution. The parents were generally overt in their declaration of support for the values, morality and practices of the school within the Catholic tradition. The parents had other options for secondary education within the town, but they made it clear that the Catholic, or at least Christian, nature of the school was important in their choice of school for their child. The parents stated that they valued the ethos and environment of the school and expected a high standard of Christian principles to be evident in the general atmosphere of the school.

These differences raise questions as to why there were such variations in perceptions and on what basis the teachers held these opinions. If this was a response to the lack of attendance at parent-teacher interviews for religious education, then it may be opinion based on a lack of sufficient evidence. Parents offered comments such as the following when discussing this:

- Parents value RE but do not attend Parent-Teacher interviews unless there is a problem. (P3)
- Parents are very busy and make priorities. If there was a need, I'd go. (P9)

- I think parents value religious education but don't express this openly to the school or to their children. (P11)
- Some parents would find talking about religious education confronting. (P1)
- Teachers are the experts. I leave it to them in all subjects. (P1)
- Many parents don't go to Church so they don't feel that they can say much about RE. (P5)
- RE is integral to the school, but there is usually enough feedback in the regular reports that are sent out. (P9)

Many of the parents indicated that religious education and the religious nature of the school were important to them and to the education of their children. The comments also showed that there was hesitancy on the part of parents to engage in dialogue about religious education, due to the parents perceiving themselves as not sufficiently educated about religion in order to feel confident in discussions about religious issues and religious education. Many parents were able to articulate an interest in religious education and a valuing of the religious education curriculum and ethos of the school. Parents were more confident in speaking about morality and values than wanting to raise theological or educational issues. This reinforced the attitude of leaving religious education, and other subjects, to the 'experts' at the school.

#### *Communication between the Parents and the Teachers*

The responses in the interviews and questionnaires indicated that the teachers and the parents rarely communicated about religious education, the ethos of the school or the values of the Catholic school. There appeared to be a passive acceptance by the parents that these aspects were the domain of the school, and that parents should not raise them for discussion or analysis. The teachers appeared to have interpreted this lack of interaction as a lack of interest from parents. The teachers may have been making judgments based on parent-teacher interviews and on the lack of feedback from parents about religious education generally. The parents, on the other hand, said that they were happy for things

to continue as they were going, because they agreed with the underlying principles and values being demonstrated by the school, but that they, as parents, did not have the expertise to raise matters related to the content or nature of the religious education curriculum. This supported the findings of Cooper (1994), working within the Lutheran system in South Australia, who found that parents often saw themselves as educational consumers and the school as the educational experts.

The teachers seemed to be hoping for a more active partnership with the parents, such as their engagement in what Lovat (1989) termed praxis learning where the parents become involved in the processes of the school rather than simply knowing about (Dykstra, 1987) these aspects. Cooper's (1994) Lutheran findings have some similarities with the data from this research, which shows that there were some parents who were active in their support for the religious education curriculum and the opportunities for their children to develop personal responses to the curriculum, while other parents were content to maintain their distance and to limit their expectations of religious education to the area of a general moral education, with an accompanying broad explanation of the nature of religious traditions. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) acknowledged that there was increasing variation in expectations relating to the purpose of Catholic schools (p. 75), but added that parents needed to support the goals of religious education (p. 23). This assumed that parents knew what these goals were, but did not refer specifically to how this support should be shown. In this case, there were parents who were more active than others in demonstrating their support, although most parents did express strong support for the goals of religious education within a range of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum strands.

In the Catholic Church documents that have been published since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) there is evidence that the Catholic Church highly values the

Catholic school as an agent for evangelization and possibly catechesis for those ready for the nurturing of their faith. The Church "... establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed." (CCE, 1977, 8). The Church, therefore, places high value on the school as a means of addressing the needs of its young members and families. It also supports plurality in the educational options available (CCE, 1977, 9), with the desire that all educational institutions would have the capacity to lead young people towards personal fulfilment in which they might realize the presence of God. The Church goes so far in its estimation of the value of the school as to state that "...the absence of the Catholic school would be a great loss for civilization and for the natural and supernatural destiny of man" (CCE, 1977, 15).

#### *Religious Education: Within and Beyond the Classroom*

The data showed that both parents and teachers saw great importance in some of the aspects of religious education discussed in the literature review, these being classroom religious education, the religious dimension of the school and religious education outside the classroom. This indicated that there was a general agreement that religious education involved more than simply the classroom curriculum. This was supported by the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation which stated that "RE should be connected to the total curriculum" (p. 25) and that "religious learning needs to be more than a classroom experience" (p. 25). *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) also noted that the goals of religious education should be expressed in the "welcome, word, welfare and worship" of the school (p. 44).

The questionnaires and interviews showed that parents were aware of the value or benefits of the ethos or environment of the school and the extra-curricula activities that engage and challenge students outside of class time. The documents of the Church supported the development of a school environment that promoted religious education and Catholic culture within and beyond the classroom. CS (CCE, 1977) advocated that religious education to be presented in distinctive classes devoted to the study of religion, but also called for a wider range of educational experiences to promote the essential goals of the religious education curriculum. The documents of the Catholic Church continually challenged schools to foster an atmosphere that was permeated by the Gospel spirit and Christian charity in which students could come to see the love of God living in the community of the school and in all its processes and structures (Abbott, [GS], 1965, 8; SCC, 1971, 35; SCC, 1997, 46, 259; CCE, 1977, 53; CCE, 1982, 41).

#### *Social Justice and Community Service within Religious Education*

In relation to religious education beyond the classroom, parents and teachers were in agreement on opportunities for students to be engaged in activities that involved service to the community and which related directly to raising awareness of social justice issues and then addressing these issues. This was linked directly to the notion of religious education as part of the religious nature of the school. There was support from teachers and parents for these community service and social justice components to be practically reflective of the underlying ethos of the school. This ethos reflected the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) call for the school to practise a fundamental option for the poor (p. 43); to offer a quality service to its members, its local community and to the culture of the Australian society; and to pursue opportunities to promote justice, reconciliation and environmental responsibility locally and globally (p. 44).

This was supported by Taylor (1993) who proposed the need to have a broad base of experiences and study that allowed for a personal faith response, if any, from all students, and a more academic dimension to suit individual students. This approach allowed for all students to respond at their current level of readiness for engagement with the faith aspects associated with, but not expected of, the religious education curriculum. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) supported the need for providing “learning experiences that cater for different students” and for ensuring that students have the opportunity for individual, considered responses (p. 26). The findings provided evidence that the teachers, parents and the Catholic Church were in general consensus regarding how they saw the scope of religious education within the school. All saw a value within the classroom curriculum, but they also saw that the whole school curriculum was influential in providing what they wanted from religious education. This was affirming for the school which attempted to provide a broad range of experiences and opportunities for students, and families in which to become involved, and to be challenged by key Catholic values and practices. Social justice programs and liturgies assisted in building an environment in which students could see the content of the religious education classes being promoted in a variety of ways by a range of staff and students.

### *Evangelization and Catechesis*

Parents and teachers were not asked specifically about how religious education should address the joint roles of evangelization and catechesis, but the data provided insights into the general attitudes towards these two important areas. The documents of the Catholic Church make constant reference to catechesis in relation to religious education. For example, three documents CT (John Paul II, 1979), the GCD (SCC, 1971), and GDC (SCC, 1997) have over 1300 mentions of “catechesis” in the texts. The only document to

actually mention “evangelization” was CS (CCE, 1977) with three occurrences of the term.

CS (CCE, 1977) stated:

It is recognized that the proper place for catechesis is the family helped by other Christian communities, especially the local parish. But the importance and need for catechetical instruction in Catholic schools cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Here young people are helped to grow towards maturity in faith. (CS, 51)

*Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) devoted section 2.1 to “The Mission of Evangelization” where it emphasized that Church documents on Catholic religious education since 1977 have allocated “the purpose and mission of the Catholic schools within the broader evangelizing mission of the Church”. The document also referred to Pope John Paul II speaking about a “new evangelization” in the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia In Oceania* (John Paul II, 2001, 18) in which schools were called to reach out to those who had been baptized but who were yet to fully receive the gospel message. Other documents to support this “new evangelization” were EN (Paul VI, 1975) and RM (John Paul II, 1990) which had relevance for schools attempting to interpret their role of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to the contemporary generation of students and parents within their school communities. This valuing of the Gospel message was supported by the expectations of parents and teachers that religious education offer opportunities for sacraments, prayer, moral development and specific Catholic teachings. Questionnaire items B3, B4, B5, B6, B12, B13, B14, B24, B26, B27, B29, B34 all provided evidence of a large majority of parents and teachers supporting specific Catholic practices and doctrines being taught to students in the school in religious education. Therefore, parents and teachers believed that religious education should be a vehicle for “evangelization”, presenting the message of Jesus Christ with reference to specific interpretations and rituals of the Catholic tradition.

There was no evidence that parents or teachers were at all concerned about the school expecting students to engage with opportunities for evangelization, and possible catechesis, with those students who were ready for that phase of faith development. Therefore, the responses of the parents and teachers contained strong support for religious education providing specific support for those Catholics, and other students who had a strong Christian faith. However, there was evidence to support the argument that religious education should provide the environment in which students could be exposed to the teachings and practices of the Christian tradition in order that they could be awakened to the message of the gospel. This is directly linked to evangelization and preparing students for receiving the Catholic Church's belief in the Good News of Jesus, the Christ.

The teachers often expressed frustration and disappointment at the lack of student response to potential catechetical experiences, where teachers interpreted the student response as apathy and non-interest. Crawford and Rossiter (1985) and Rossiter (1997) examined this issue from the perspective that the teacher's response was the result of a complexity of expectations. Although the teachers were aware of the multi-cultural and multi-faith influences at work in the classroom, there were still catechetical, or at least evangelisation, expectations consistent with previous eras of religious education where the students were predominantly practising Catholics. There was also the expectation of teachers who wanted the religious education class to be personal and relevant to the students, but the teachers became frustrated when their expectations were aimed at a level that was too personal to be realised by the student group (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Rossiter, 2008). Here, there are a number of factors interplaying and interrelated. There were expectations on, and from, teachers that religious education would not only make a difference in knowledge and skills but that there would be spiritual development as well. This brief discussion highlights that there may be a complex set of factors influencing the

teacher frustration and anxiety when religious education classes do not reach the spiritual or personally-engaging levels that are often desired.

More research may shed light on the causes of this frustration, which may have a negative impact on the teachers as they attempt to make religious education relevant and personal for students. Teachers may be interpreting the expectations of religious education in light of the classroom as a faith community, rather than what is more like a public forum. The teachers still valued the experiences as providing “food for thought” for students who might later in life come to a faith response. This support for an evangelizing process was evident in many interviews and questionnaire responses. The teacher frustration could well be based on an unreal expectation that the classroom religious education curriculum had the potential to generate a religious response, when the experience may simply become a part of the students’ many experiences that ultimately assist them in making sense of the way that they view their identity – personally and communally. Maroney (2007) found that the influence of the religious education curriculum was rated as low by the students in terms of its importance in their faith development. McLaughlin (2002) described situations where many young people found that Catholic education created more confusion than clarity in terms of their beliefs about God. This was linked to a lack of clarity and /or contradiction about Church teaching from teachers.

#### *Awakenings and Shared Christian Praxis*

It was interesting to note that the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum had selected the SCP approach to the planning and implementation of the religious education units. The Ballarat diocese document stated that “The pedagogical approach to classroom Religious

Education in *Awakenings* represents a critical adaptation of SCP (Groome, 1991)” (CDB, 2005, p.117). Groome (1980) proposed that:

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).

*Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) attempted to adapt this praxis approach to suit the needs of multi-faith classrooms where students express varying levels of interest in the religious education process and content. Engebretson (1997) explained that Groome (1980, 1991) translated Habermas’s emancipatory way of knowing in which the learning moved to new learning through reflection on past experiences. It was an action-reflection model that led to change, new knowledge and action, in response to this reflective experience. Groome (1991) believed that this approach would allow people of all stages of faith development to critique their experiences, gain exposure to the Christian story and move towards an appropriate response for their stage of readiness. There has been agreement with Groome in many dioceses within Australia where the SCP approach has been adapted for religious education Guidelines. Initial work was done by the diocese of Parramatta, followed by the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn, and recently this has been built on in the collaborative development of Guidelines for the Victorian dioceses of Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale with the Archdiocese of Hobart. These dioceses have endorsed the catechetical model by adapting Groome’s original process to cater for a variety of situations and, from this, developed *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005), which is the school’s religious education curriculum documentation.

There have been some in the religious education field who questioned the application of this process within modern, pluralist classrooms (Rossiter 1988, 1997; Lovat 1991; Ryan & Malone 1996; Ryan, 1997; Raduntz, 1994). For example, Ryan

(1999) expressed concerns that catechetical models such as SCP “offer fewer options for ways to respond to the greater awareness and sensitivity towards other religious traditions” (p. 21). Ryan (1997) believed that because the contemporary religious education classroom was not a gathering of committed Christians, SCP, as described by Groome (1991, 1998) was not valid. Rossiter (1997) expressed the view that despite the adaptations to Groome’s original praxis approach, the SCP approach still had implicit and explicit assumptions that failed to address the needs of the contemporary religious education classroom. Lovat (1991) acknowledged the value of the praxis approach for small faith gatherings, but questioned the translation of this process to the diversity of the compulsory religious education classroom in the school. Others, such as Welbourne (1997), believed that the SCP approach could be modified to accommodate the modern composition of Catholic school religious education classrooms.

Issues arising from this include whether this adaptation maintains the integrity of the original praxis model and if it is possible, or appropriate, to apply such a catechetical model to a non-catechetical setting. Also in question is whether SCP, as utilized in the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documents, allows teachers the flexibility to draw on a variety of educational approaches in their teaching of religious education. Questions have been raised as to how effective this model is in ensuring that the students are led from their own personal experience towards a greater knowledge of, and appreciation of, the Christian tradition, through a sequential structure that assists teachers with sound educational practices.

Groome (1980, 1991) and Ryan and Malone (1996) agreed that one of the keys to successful praxis was how the teacher interpreted the approach and then implemented it. Ryan (1997) was also concerned that many teachers would not fully engage with the full praxis model due to fear of a lack of confidence and knowledge to be able to assist

students to critique the Christian story for their own lives. It was noted in the data collected for this research that the parents had little knowledge and/or understanding of SCP and that half of the teachers also expressed a lack of sound knowledge of this approach. Yet the teachers were happy with the curriculum documentation. This suggested that the teachers may have been more focused on the content rather than on the proposed process. The parents, on the other hand, simply left it to the school and teachers to provide the classroom content and processes.

This was consistent with the findings of Cooper (1994), who found that many parents in one Lutheran school were in partnership with the school in so far as this was in terms of “participation” rather than a deeper engaging “involvement” which required parents to become aware of details of the curriculum content and processes. Flynn (1979) found that there was an assumption that the family role was to supplement the school and, therefore, there was a low need for communication skills in this relationship. Similarly, Mackay (1993) found that many parents felt a sense of separateness or inadequacy and so they adopted a passive support role towards the school. Many of the parents regarded this as the area for ‘the experts’, not an opportunity for parents to become involved, while other parents expected to be fully informed and involved in the religious education processes.

The findings also raised the issue of whether there was a general disinterest from teachers in theory and a preference to concentrate on the practicalities of implementing the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum units. The teachers’ response, that many of them did not know details of the preferred pedagogical approach, indicated that the teachers may have been more interested in showing how they achieved the stated outcomes than in how they went about this task. This may also be a reflection of the *Curriculum Standards Framework II* ([CSF II], Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2002) model for curriculum planning which was mandated for Victorian schools as an outcomes-based

approach to teaching and learning. It may have reflected the general sense that the SCP was not a new approach but a slight variation on the established model for religious education previously employed within the school. This was the underlying message received by the researcher in the interviews with the teachers.

GCD (SCC1984) stated that the Catholic Church expected secondary schools to assist adolescents in their search for a meaning in life by providing a catechesis where:

The principal task of catechesis in adolescence will be to further a genuinely Christian understanding of life. It must shed the light of the Christian message on the realities which have greater impact on the adolescent, such as the meaning of bodily existence, love and the family, the standards to be followed in life, work and leisure, justice and peace, and so on. (SCC, 1984, 84)

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) asserted that personal change for students needed to come from an educational approach that “may *dispose* students towards personal change” (p.5). The challenge for the school, therefore, becomes how to appropriately adapt the SCP approach to provide the opportunities for this personal change, but in such a way that the teachers feel that it is a realistic model that “*harmonises with their ordinary experience of classroom teaching and learning*” (p.5).

#### *Content of the Classroom Religious Education Program*

The analysis of the data from the parents and the teachers involved in the research showed that there were many areas of agreement related to the content of the classroom religious education program. There was agreement that the foundational stories of Christianity should be taught in religious education. This included teaching about Jesus as portrayed in the biblical accounts and his role in salvation as understood by Christian tradition. This also included the need to teach about other biblical heroes and for students to learn about the history of Christianity and, in particular, the Roman Catholic Church’s history. Both

parents and teachers agreed that there should be commitment in the religious education curriculum to teaching about a range of religious traditions. This exposure to different religious traditions was seen by parents and teachers as leading to students having a greater acceptance of other traditions and also could lead to a better appreciation of the students' own religious tradition when the students examined the Catholic tradition against other Christian and non-Christian traditions.

The data, which was supported by Crawford and Rossiter (2006), showed that most of the parents and the teachers who took part in the research expected students to have the opportunity to discuss contemporary issues and the role of religion in the world. This included students being exposed to a greater awareness of the key issues seen as relevant to religions in general, and the Catholic Church in particular. Hughes (1994) noted that the development of changes in Church life created a focus on the application of faith rather than on the pure knowledge of theology (p. 14). This resonated with the findings of both sets of questionnaire data, which showed that students should be given the opportunity to discuss their personal understanding of, and responses to, Church teachings. The majority of the parents and the teachers agreed that students should be helped to see the possible positive and negative influences that religion might have on individuals or societies. There was also agreement on the need to raise student knowledge of contemporary and historical religious conflicts and persecutions in the world. Complementing this was a general awareness of how religious ideas were applied to specific issues, including an agreement on the need to raise awareness of cults, sects and fundamentalism in contemporary society. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) agreed on the need to develop critical awareness of the nature and possible influence of these cults or movements, but also noted that these cults or movements had an impact on a small number of students (p. 223-224).

The findings may have reflected an undercurrent of fear in parents of students being influenced by some of the fundamentalist or extreme views of religions as portrayed in the media. This could be motivated by the reporting of violent behaviours associated with extremist religious groups and the atmosphere of fear generated by the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States of America (Cusack and Digance, 2003), the England underground and bus bombings, and cult communities such as Jonestown and Waco and their associated massacres. Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 98-100) identified the influence of violence as an important factor for parents, teachers and students in the development of personal identity in contemporary society. They also described a range of factors that influenced “identity health” (p. 110). There was a strong connection between the findings of the parent and teacher surveys and these “identity health” concerns. Parents and teachers were concerned about how these factors could be addressed within the religious education classroom and within the broader school practices.

Parents and teachers expressed concern about how religion was portrayed in the media and how this influenced religious education. It was reported by both groups that religious traditions, even the ‘established’ churches, receive regular negative media attention due to issues such as the widespread child abuse prosecutions. This was supported by two studies by Lichter, Amundson, & Lichter (1993) and Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson (2000), as quoted by Rocha and Morrow (2004), which concluded that on most controversial issues involving Catholic teaching, the Church did not fare well in media debates. This presented challenges to the school regarding how religion was presented to students, highlighting the positive contribution of religion while acknowledging the shortfalls in aspects of Church personnel and practice.

There were many areas of agreement regarding content in religious education and these related closely to the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation which advocates eight

strands or areas of study. These strands are Scripture, God, Jesus, Christian Living, Christian Prayer, Religion and Society, Church and Sacraments. The areas of parental and teacher agreement covered all of these strands. The strands parallel the sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (John Paul II, 1994) which provided a framework to cover all the major dimensions of Catholic faith.

### *The Impact of Specialized Language in Communication with Parents*

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) noted that one critical factor in the perceived relevance of the Church is whether or not its language seems to correspond with 'real life' as people experience it. If not, then they will have no time for official religion, believing that they can get by well enough without it. (p. 398). They added:

But what is needed now is expression in language and concepts that have more purchase on the problems in modern life. This proposal does not mean abandoning traditional theological constructs in favour of vague secularised ones that have more popular appeal, but it suggests that the faith tradition will increasingly lose its potential for inspiring people's lives if it does not try to express its religious messages within interpretations that are more evidently connected with the spiritual-moral issues people experience today. This is not just trying to be trendy, but seriously engaged with the content and processes through which people draw on cultural elements in their search for a meaningful human life. (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 399)

In light of this insight from Crawford and Rossiter (2006), it was found that approximately 80% of both the teachers and the parents who completed the questionnaires expressed the expectation that parents would be confused with the use of specialized theological or catechetical language. The teachers were more comfortable with specialized terms, and expected other teachers to understand and appreciate the use of specialized language in discussing religious education. The teachers showed a greater appreciation of these terms as helpful for discussing religious education than did the

parents. Most difficult were the terms 'mission', 'ministry', 'catechesis' and 'witnessing'. Except for the specific term 'catechesis', the terms were of a more general nature and parents could have been expected to be more comfortable with these terms. The teachers were not particularly comfortable with 'catechesis' although it was a term which was widely used in the Church documents (cf Table 2.1). The teachers were always more likely to find the terms helpful in relation to religious education due to specific training in the subject, but the teachers, together with the parents, also found 'evangelisation' and 'inculturation' less than helpful. This may have been because the terms are not often used by teachers when discussing the day to day religious education program.

Most professional development and faculty meetings related to religious education within the school in recent times had been devoted to the practicalities of implementing the curriculum units, and to the more general nature of the religious education documentation, without particular reference to the relevance of evangelization and inculturation to religious education. Haydon (1997) found that there were difficulties with shared meanings of specialized language even among highly qualified colleagues. It was likely that degrees of confusion or variation in accepted meaning would take place among teachers and parents in regard to particular terms which may or may not be in regular use by members of the parent or teacher groups.

This could have implications for when these teachers attend professional development sessions on religious education or when they are planning units of work. It may be difficult to have a clear understanding of how the unit is designed to provide for both dimensions within the unit. It may also be that the terms may not be familiar but the concepts of proclaiming the gospel (evangelization) and teaching those who have a developing faith (catechesis) may be readily understood by teachers as a natural part of the

religious education program, as most of the teachers responded that religious education should provide the fundamental knowledge and practices of the Catholic tradition. It could also be the view of many teachers that religious education is more of an academic subject than a specific extension of the Church's teaching role, because of their awareness of the diversity of the religious experiences of the students in their classes.

This classification of religious education was more in tune with the phenomenology (Smart, 1969, 1973) and typology (Habel and Moore, 1982) approaches which advocated a way of addressing religious awareness from a relatively neutral position, with an emphasis on knowledge about religious traditions that may or may not lead to the development of religious faith. It was based on ensuring that religious education was educationally sound rather than catechetical in its focus. Buchanan (2007) detailed the transition from the life-centred catechetical approach to this type of religious education that was based in more cognitive principles. Most teachers and parents supported this approach which incorporated contemporary educationally sound principles rather than the approach that focussed on self-disclosure and which was more overtly faith oriented. The use of 'religious' language had a more direct link to this faith or catechetical view of religious education.

The term 'witnessing' was helpful to most teachers (89%) but to only 31% of parents. This was a significant difference and might be explained through teachers having greater exposure to the term in training and religious education documents. The term "witness" has wide generic use in society and parents could have been expected to have a general understanding of the term and its association with religious education. Possibly, this association may have been made to the religion rather than the subject and this may have led to a less positive rating of the term. The finding that parents had a negative attitude to the Catholic Church was consistent with the findings of Dixon, et al (2007)

where many disaffected Catholics who had distanced themselves from the Church reported that they believed “that the Church is out of touch with the current world and is not relevant in their own lives.” (p. 49)

It was suggested by parents and teachers that religious education language was of low value for parents. This implied that parents had a lack of confidence in using the terms, and that they had little knowledge of the meaning of the terms. It was generally thought that families did not discuss religion often and that religion was seen to lack relevance in the daily lives of many parents. Again, this was consistent with the research of Dixon, et al (2007) where it was found that many disassociated Catholic adults often had a poor knowledge of Church teachings, and that as they distanced themselves from the Church, they built barriers to limit engagement with Church teaching and therefore language. There was also the belief that the Church had offered little adult education for parents about religious issues, and that it was therefore easier for parents to leave religious education to the teachers, who were seen as custodians of the religious education knowledge and language. Some parents saw a link to the language of television evangelists and the ‘hard sell’ of religion. Parents may have reacted with a lack of trust in Church authority, as examined by the research of Dixon, et al (2007) research, where misuse of power and authority in the Church and the perception of the irrelevance of Church to life today, added together to provide many adults with reason to move away from Church life, and subsequently from its language.

Teachers acknowledged the need to avoid assumptions about parents’ understanding the specific language of religious education. Education of parents about religious education was seen as a priority in order to improve parent knowledge of the curriculum and processes employed in religious education. Teachers, and some of the parents, believed that there was a need to raise the awareness of parents towards the

benefits that religious education could have for their children. It was hoped that this would make the senior religious education program more valued in the eyes of parents. If parents were to be supported as the first educators in faith for their children (CCE, 1988), then the school had a responsibility to ensure that the parents had the opportunity to become familiar and more comfortable with the language associated with religious education.

The difficulty here was that many of the parents did not want to engage in this dialogue, as they had accepted being separated from their faith tradition and its practices, although many would still engage with the tradition for major events, such as Christian baptism and marriage. This was reflected in the research of Dixon, et al (2007) where about half of those surveyed, who had stopped frequent Mass attendance, still occasionally had contact with the parish. In Australia, Mass attendance for Catholics has dropped in all age categories under 75 years of age (Dixon, et al, 2007). The parents who responded to the questionnaires indicated a similar trend in that 30% attended Church services (any denomination) weekly or monthly with the remaining 70% only occasionally (30%), rarely (25%) or never (14%).

Rymarz (2007) found that many parents, even committed Catholic parents, found it difficult to express themselves when it came to explaining why they held their religious beliefs and values. They were more likely to speak about their religious faith in terms of morality and ethical approaches to life. The parents interviewed responded to questions about faith and religious identity in terms that were more attuned to their natural vocabulary. This indicated a lack of ecclesial and religious vocabulary or clarity in the use of this vocabulary. The parents were likely to describe their faith as personal and private, and there was an accompanying lack of willingness to explain their rationale for belief or practice (Rymaz, 2007). This may be linked again to a lack of confidence with

the language of religion. It also could be linked with the privatisation of religion which is a significant factor in Australia (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

### *Perceptions of Parental Knowledge of Religious Education*

All teachers agreed that parents did not have a good knowledge of religious education, compared with half the parents who thought that parents did have a good understanding of the religious education curriculum. One in five parents believed that teachers had unrealistic expectations of religious education, while predictably no teachers agreed with that view. In relation to the specifics of the local religious education curriculum documentation and approach, few parents knew about SCP or had a good knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum of the Ballarat diocese. Compared with this, most of the teachers were comfortable with their knowledge of SCP and about half of the teachers had a good knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation. The fact that only half of the teachers expressed adequate knowledge of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum was educationally significant. There was an expectation from the religious education teachers that the Director of Religious Education would 'translate' the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documents into working documents for the classroom. The 'time-poor' teachers were of good will but limited time resources to develop curriculum materials.

The importance of this is linked directly to the fact that the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation is the foundation of the school classroom curriculum. If half of the teachers lacked a sound appreciation of the nature and content of this approach to religious education, then there could be questions raised about how successfully these teachers were implementing the basics of the curriculum. The Catholic Education Office wanted *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) to be seen as more than simply a set of lesson plans. It was to

be an approach to religious education that reflected the diocesan preferred view of how to teach religious education with reference to the core beliefs of the Catholic faith and the nature of the Catholic school in the light of the contemporary context faced by students, families and schools.

Buchanan (2007) found that Religious Education Co-ordinators and teachers often had difficulty maintaining reading about curriculum change due to time impositions from other aspects of their teaching loads and the demands of schools generally. Buchanan (2007) noted that many of these teachers were not specifically trained in religious education method and taught in the field as a result of personal interest or in response to a request from the school. This lack of academic preparation would have limited the exposure to the language of religious education for many teachers in the study. Only half of the teachers who took part in the study had gained professional qualifications in religious education. Buchanan (2007) also found that some Religious Education Co-ordinators believed that there were many teachers who were “disconnected from the faith” (p. 184). That is, these teachers were no longer Catholics in the traditional sense of attending Mass and actively engaging in parish life. This reality, if applied to the teachers in this study, would have had an impact on their understanding of a range of faith and religious issues and may have influenced their receptiveness to become engaged with the theoretical underpinnings of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum documentation. Then again, disengagement from parish could be seen by the teachers as something quite separate from their capacity to teach religious education, as they might be well-read on matters pertaining to the material that they were teaching.

The teachers’ perceptions of the levels of parent knowledge were based on their interaction, or lack of it, with parents. The teachers linked the parents’ understanding of religious education with the perceived lack of value attached to the subject by parents.

This was challenged as a valid means of measurement when the parents showed that they do value the school and its religious education program. The parents, through the interviews, explained that the lack of parental involvement in religious education was not the result of a lack of interest, but that many parents believed that they had a lack of knowledge of the whole field of 'religion' and thought that they would appear inept or ignorant in discussions about religious matters. Their lack of confidence encouraged the parents to leave the religious education to the 'experts', the teachers. This is supported by the findings of Rymarz (2007) where it was found that parents lacked confidence in discussing faith and religion in families as well.

Many parents did not want to feel intimidated in religious education interviews or discussions, and many felt threatened because of their perceived ignorance. There was also a link to the uncomfortable situation in which many parents found that they had become disassociated from the Church. Hughes (1994, 1998) showed that there were many parents of secondary school students who fell into the category of 'lapsed' Catholics or Christians. These adults rarely attended Church services or engaged in other organized religious activities although they often argued that they were 'religious' and had individual beliefs about God and the 'bigger questions of life'.

Most parents did not express negativity towards the Church, Catholic schools or their own experience of religious education if they had attended a Catholic school. The majority of parents said that they had positive memories of religious education and that religious education was an important aspect of their choice of secondary school for their child. This affirmation of the religious education program would be affirming for many teachers who lacked this positive feedback, and who were left to interpret a lack of response as a lack of support. Parents and teachers described a similar situation in many other curriculum domains. The parents explained that a lack of knowledge of all areas of

the curriculum encouraged them to leave it to the expert teachers, in order to avoid appearing ignorant, or because the parents did not have the time or energy in their busy lives to become more involved in curriculum issues. There was still the underlying parent perception that religious education was ultimately more valuable, and therefore deserving of the parents' time and energy, if the subject contributed to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) score at the end of Year 12. (The ENTER score allows the ranking of students for tertiary entrance to universities and colleges.) Although this was most evident at the Year 11 and 12 stages, there could be a flow-on effect down through the other year levels. As religious education was not viewed as helping with their child's ENTER score, the subject was given low importance.

There was a separate group of parents who simply did not have any interest in religious education at all, and tolerated it as part of being at a Catholic school, as long as it did not interfere with 'real' subjects. In the interviews, many teachers and parents expressed dismay at this attitude and its effects on students and teachers. The parents who simply tolerated religious education were perceived by most of the teachers and parents who were interviewed as not appreciating the contribution of religious education to the development of the whole person of the student, especially their moral and spiritual development. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) is explicit in highlighting the goal of developing the whole person, "... the promotion of each human person in all their dimensions, capacities and relationships" (p. 42); "fostering the authentic human development of each student (p.43). This is reflected in CS (CCE, 1977, 29) where it was stated that "The school must begin from the principle that its educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person".

*Religious Education as an Academic and Compulsory Subject with Assessment as in other Subjects*

Most of the parents and all of the teachers who took part in the study strongly supported religious education in Years 7 to 10, but for Year 12, and usually Year 11, there was a substantial disagreement between teachers and parents about the value and status of religious education. This was more evident in the responses to the questionnaires than in the interviews, and was probably influenced by a disproportionate number of interviewed parents who were interested in religious education, as most of those who were not articulate about religious education or who were not interested in it may not have made themselves available for the interviews. There is little in the current literature with which to compare this finding. When pressed in the interviews, the parents said that they believed that parents responded to the questionnaires in such a way because they had little knowledge of the actual curriculum at the senior school, or at any other level either, and that parents saw that religious education in the final years was taking away valuable time from other subjects that would contribute to the tertiary entrance ranking (ENTER) score after Year 12. In addition there had been pressure from the media in the preceding years to raise literacy and numeracy levels, and this might have had an impact on the value attached to subjects that were seen to address numeracy and literacy.

Other specific subjects were positively viewed by the parents when they were seen to have a direct link to tertiary education or vocational choices. Subjects such as chemistry, media studies, and dance could be linked directly to first-choice post-secondary options for students. Religious education was not seen by many parents as having such a direct study or career pathway. Some parents and teachers expressed a deep concern about this finding, as it was seen to indicate that those parents who advocated optional senior religious education seemed to lack a perception of the holistic educational benefits

of religious education for the students. There seemed little real value given to a course that addressed morality, spirituality, decision making, justice, and which challenged students to consider the 'big questions' about the meaning of human life and the possibility of God or a higher being or state of being. Most parents were not aware that the school offered the option of religious education that contributed to the ENTER score.

In contrast, the parents strongly supported the compulsory community service program of 20 hours per year in Years 11 and 12, and the retreat and seminar day program offered to these students. This form of religious education was not viewed in the same negative light as compulsory classes although it was time consuming and demanded that students take personal responsibility for their service placements.

The teachers were in unanimous support of compulsory religious education at all levels of the school. They were generally content with the current offerings at the senior levels with the community service, retreats and seminar days. The Catholic Education Office for the Diocese of Ballarat was less enthusiastic about the current arrangements because it was hoped that the senior students would satisfy the stated outcomes of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) program at this post-compulsory level. The school was attempting to ensure that the eight strands of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum were addressed in the Years 11 and 12 programs. The teachers were very strong in their assertions that religious education be treated as an academically equal subject in all year levels. This was probably based on the teachers' knowledge of the curriculum materials, of which parents did not have much knowledge. In addition, teachers were assessing all units being taught and were aware of the need to plan units with assessment in mind.

The Catholic Church documents expected the school to provide religious education that was on an academically equal footing to other subjects, and which was taught using similar educational 'best-practice' depending on the nature of the particular units and the

abilities of the students (CDB, 2005, p. 25-26). *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005, p. 128) emphasized that the religious education curriculum needed to be structured around year level outcomes and in so doing established consistency with other discipline areas across the broader school curriculum. The document noted that care should be employed in the outcomes-based approach to ensure that the development of attitudes and values were not neglected as they were more difficult to quantify and assess (p. 129).

The questionnaire and interview findings indicated that there was a large gap between the familiarity of teachers and parents about religious education generally, and particularly concerning the current *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and SCP approach within the school. The findings indicated that there was a strong link between how religious education was perceived academically and the way that parents and teachers viewed assessment strategies for the subject. Although many of the teachers were of a similar age to the parents, they agreed on the value of assessment of religious education and therefore supported the content and processes of the subject. This was influenced by the exposure that teachers have had to the theory of religious education, to which parents did not have access.

The teachers had access to the foundational religious education documents of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum of the diocese, which provide detailed support for the academic nature of religious education and the need to assess the subject in ways that correspond with other curriculum areas. The teachers had also received regular education about the nature and purpose of religious education throughout their teacher education and/or their teaching service in Catholic schools. Some, though not all, would have read relevant Church documents such as ARFEC (Holohan, 1999), CSTTM (CCE, 1997), CS (CCE, 1977) and *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation which all encouraged teachers

to teach and assess religious education using similar processes as would be used in other curriculum domains.

In addition, teachers were required to report to parents on the performance of students in assessment tasks in religious education. This was a strong influence in focusing teachers on the assessment strategies necessary to determine student progress across a range of skills and knowledge as required by the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum and the Victorian government's curriculum guidelines for schools. Parents were familiar with this reporting process with the learning outcomes clearly identified and grades given for assessment tasks. However, the parents may have failed to make the connection in religious education between the stated outcomes and assessment grades with the academic expectations underpinning these outcomes.

#### *Religious Education as a means of helping Students to make Informed Decisions*

The majority of parents and teachers expected the school to provide the means by which the children could make informed choices as they made up their own minds about faith, spirituality, morality and values. It was not that these aspects of human life were not important, rather it was that these parents wanted to give their children the freedom and ability to choose their own religious culture and identity. Within Australian society, many adults within the parents' age range had rejected active membership of traditional Catholic and Christian communities. This was a consequence of either a desire to develop a personalized faith and values or, it could reflect a movement from traditional Church membership, influenced by perceptions of adults having problems with how the Church functioned or what it taught (Hughes, 2006), by a lack of motivation to participate, and by a lack of time.

These indicators show that adults were leaving the Church and its authority structures and therefore wanted their children to be capable of making personal choices about faith and religious practice. This was in contrast with the situation for this parent group, who had often experienced no or little choice about religious affiliation when they were young people. They were thus expecting their children to have this opportunity for choice at a much younger age than they themselves had made personalized choices.

The questionnaires and interviews showed that those parents who completed the questionnaire did strongly value religious education in the school, and this confirmed previous findings by Flynn (1979) and Groome (1991), but while this was the case, the data generated by this study suggested that there was considerable ambivalence and possible uncertainty about the religious education curriculum. This uncertainty could have been because most parents in the school did not attend religious education parent-teacher meetings to discuss students' reports. It may also have been because, as the questionnaires and interviews showed, many parents did not examine the religious education curriculum which was available on the school website. This reluctance of the parents to seek information about religious education might also have been directly linked to the perception that religious education did not have value in terms of vocational options post-secondary school.

There was also evidence that the parents had a little knowledge of all secondary school subjects, and refrained from investigating most subject content, choosing to leave the curriculum to the 'expert' teachers in the school. It was only in those subjects which were seen to have direct vocational purpose, such as English and Mathematics, that most parents became actively engaged in dialogue with the teachers. Again, these parents were not becoming involved in the curriculum issues so much as they may have been responding to public interest and value for that subject, because there was a greater

expectation for parents to do so and these subjects were seen to be linked to the ENTER score.

### *Morality and Values in Religious Education*

The majority of the teachers and the parents who completed the questionnaires and interviews strongly agreed on the importance of religious education in relation to the development of morality and values education. This was evident for all levels of the secondary school curriculum. This was consistent with many theorists in the area of morality and faith development who described the teenage years as critical to personalized faith and moral growth. Most of the theorists such as Fowler (1981, 1986, 1992), Kohlberg (1984) and Erikson (1975) argued that adolescence generally, and late adolescence specifically, as it corresponded to late secondary school, was a stage or phase of development when the young person was in transition towards independent choices about their key values and faith. This made these years important and influential in light of the parents' desire for their children to be assisted in the transition from dependent to independent thinking and commitment, to a faith and value system that was chosen after critical assessment and reflection on the traditions presented by family and by the school.

The high value placed on moral education by parents and teachers supported the school's attempts to highlight moral critique and personal reflection in all years of the secondary religious education curriculum. The senior years, 11 and 12, had a particular focus on developing skills in critiquing society and situations in order to determine the values and practices that best suited the student's value system, and which helped the student to appreciate their responsibilities to others and to the environment. The *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum provided consistent support for moral development across all curriculum levels, with the Christian living strand having multiple units that had

a decision-making and values focus. Section 2.3 of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005, p. 43)

related this focus to the creation of a religious culture:

It connects experiences and insights in a framework of meaning.

The human person	Who do we think we are?
Creation	What sort of world do we live in?
The Common Good	How can we live together?
Past-Present-Future	What time is it?
Faith and Commitment	What can we trust?
Justice and Compassion	Whose side are we on?
Identity and Boundaries	Who is my neighbour?
Spirituality and Interior Life	What is our heart's desire?

(adapted from Groome, 2003)

The middle and senior school retreats and seminar days gave morality a key place, as students were given the opportunity to explore the application of values to life situations and to reflect on their own personal values and practices in relation to the Christian moral codes and values.

### *Gender Issues Surrounding Parental Responses*

The interviews showed that teachers and parents believed that the questionnaires were mainly completed by females because the females predominantly had the educational role in families, as they were seen as the nurturers. Males were generally seen as not interested, too busy or that they become involved only in the 'big' issues to do with discipline and career choice. This observation was made by males and females in the interviews, where the gender numbers were more even than in the questionnaires. With mothers being given such a dominant position in relation to the education of children, the role of many mothers working outside the home may be a contributing factor to the breakdown in the family's expectations of religious education. As the focus of the family becomes more economic in nature with both parents working, the focus of the education of the children may become more oriented towards employment. Parents continually

identified their concerns about the ENTER score being an important consideration in the senior years of school.

Religious values were closely tied to family values, and if the focus of family values had subtly changed more towards an economic one, then it would be possible to see how religious values may have taken a lesser role in the family (Hughes, 1994). Morality could still remain a priority but the actual religious identity may have been too difficult with time and energy needed for more domestic practices and employment opportunities and expectations. The high female participation figure is reflected in the report *Catholics who have Stopped Attending Mass* (Dixon, et al, [CSAM], 2007). In this report, which was derived from interviews, it was 80% females who completed the interviews on faith related matters. The similarity in figures for the questionnaires in this study and for the interviews in the CSAM (Dixon, et al, 2007) study may indicate that females are more likely to participate in activities perceived to be related to religion and religious matters.

#### *Religious Education and the Spiritual and Religious Development of Students*

Most of the parents and the teachers agreed that religious education should provide opportunities for students to develop spiritually. There was a lack of agreement about what was actually meant by 'spirituality', with many parents seeing this as a general reference to how one sees the world and interacts with others and the environment. Some other parents were particular in expecting religious education to provide support for Catholic spiritual values linked to God, liturgy, parish involvement, prayer and Scripture. A small group of parents wanted Christian spiritual development which emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as saviour. This variation in interpretation or expectation of spiritual development was referred to in Hyde (2006) and Tacey (1995, 2000, 2003) where the distinction between religious spirituality and secular spirituality

was discussed in detail. Many of the parents and teachers had a paradigm of spirituality that was largely religious, but which was also influenced by the growth in secular spirituality, which placed a greater emphasis on the individual as a spiritual entity, without reference to a relationship with a higher being or God as would be expected in religious spirituality. Much contemporary spiritual discussion focuses on human relationships with the environment and explores non-traditional methods of linking humans with non-human forces in the cosmos.

The parents' responses need to be seen against this background of individual self-fulfilment without religious theologies or traditional support networks. Therefore when the parents spoke of spiritual development opportunities, they may well have been referring to aspects quite different from the religious education teachers' notion of a religious spirituality based within the Christian tradition. Hyde (2006) identified three aspects of what Crawford and Rossiter (2006) called the 'geography' of the spirituality discussion. Hyde (2006) noted that spirituality was "an essential human trait" that helped humans to move "towards Ultimate Unity" and that spirituality is given a form of expression either in a religious or non-religious way (p. 26).

In the interviews, the parents and teachers were more explicit in their expectations of opportunities for the development of a religious spirituality within the Catholic or other religious tradition of students and families. In terms of Catholic or Christian spirituality, both parents and teachers agreed on the teaching of traditional prayers from the Catholic tradition. There was also strong agreement that all students, irrespective of their personal faith tradition or personal attitude towards the Catholic tradition, should attend all school liturgies and be present at all prayer services. Neither the teachers nor the parents expected this involvement in liturgies or the religious education classes to increase the students' commitment to local parish and community religious liturgies and activities, but

there was an expectation that the students would become more understanding of the Catholic tradition and its practices. This reflected an acknowledgement by many parents and teachers that the students would be making individual choices about their spirituality, and that the school had a role in providing the framework in which the students could make decisions about spiritual matters and personal spiritual beliefs and practices.

Alongside this were a group of parents and teachers who expected religious education to provide specific Catholic spiritual development, with the aim of students accepting this as the preferred spiritual model in their lives, either while they were at school or later in life. There was also agreement among most of the parents and teachers that students should be given experiences of meditation and silence in the chapel as a place of sacred space. This was placed alongside reflection on Scripture and prayer services as examples of the desire for students to be given structured spiritual exercises in order to open them to the possibilities of a spiritual dimension in their lives.

The work of de Souza (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) showed that perceptions of the nature of spirituality among young people are broad and reflect a search for the spiritual in life but, as with many of the parents, they are seeking this in religious and non-traditional ways. The data showed that the parents and teachers, generally, were aware of this and supported the school in encouraging the spiritual exploration of the young people. Engebretson (2007) examined the spirituality of secondary school male students and found that an important component of their spiritual development was linked to their search for personal integrity and relationships. This was an aspect of spirituality highlighted by most parents and teachers, in their desire for students to be given support in developing meaningful relationships, values and a strong sense of personal integrity in their capacity to critique and respond positively to situations and relationships. Overall, there was strong agreement for the religious education curriculum and other school programs to

provide opportunities for spiritual development within a broad view of what this may entail, from traditional Catholic spirituality, to a more open-ended notion of spiritual growth through personal growth and awareness.

*The Importance of the Religious Education Teacher as a Witness to Catholic Faith*

The data from the questionnaires and interviews showed that the parents and teachers expected, or hoped, that the religious education teachers would be witnesses to the Catholic faith. If this was not to be the case, then the expectation was that the teacher would be a witness to Christian beliefs and values. This expectation was directed at all teachers and staff of the school, and not restricted to the teacher of religious education, although the religious education teachers were seen to have particular responsibilities within their roles. *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005, p. 46) quoted from RDECS (CCE, 1988) in confirming the expectation of the Ballarat Diocese that “the prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teacher, as individuals and as a community” (CCE, 1988, 26). The Catholic Church expected that the teachers would imitate Christ in revealing the Christian message by what they said and by their every action and behaviour (CCE, 1977). *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) noted that “each member of the school staff is obliged by their terms of employment to promote actively the religious culture, mission and aims of the school” (p. 48).

Pope John Paul II (1987), quoted in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn document, *Teaching in Catholic Schools - A Statement of Principle*, gave direct guidelines for teachers in Catholic schools:

The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility ... To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge ... (The changing times) demand that educators be open to new

cultural influences and interpret them for young pupils in the light of Christian faith. You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching ... But your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence ... Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness and the joy of life lived in accordance with Christ's teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest.

John Paul II,(1987) cited in Archdiocese of  
Canberra and Goulburn (2006, p.1)

The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn document, *Teaching in Catholic Schools - A Statement of Principle* (John Paul II, 2006, p. 2) added that:

Only a person supportive of Catholic Education philosophy may be a teacher in a Catholic School. Teachers bear witness to Christ and Christian values in their own lives and by personally supporting, evaluating, developing and disseminating the Catholic School philosophy.

Accompanying this expectation is the question of how reasonable or realistic it is to expect this, given the multi-faith nature of the staff of the school. Also in question is defining what it means to “witness” to the Catholic or Christian tradition. Many of the parents, who themselves have redefined their Christian identity in terms of how they personalize their faith and religious practices, place expectations upon teachers that are not being reflected in the families of the students in the school. Many staff would argue that it is possible to actively promote the mission and values of the Catholic tradition without personally engaging with the tradition.

The majority of the teachers who took part in the questionnaires and interviews had a strong expectation that religious education teachers, in particular, would be active witnesses to the Catholic tradition and would share the core beliefs of the Catholic Church. There was acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by many teachers with aspects of the Church’s teachings as they were applied to situations. There was a blurring of the distinction between the teacher as a source of faith development and the teacher as a

professional educator communicating the essential elements of the curriculum. This reflected the tension between religious education as faith enrichment and education about religion and the role of the teacher in each of these dimensions.

EN (Paul VI, 1976, 41) stated that “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”. This clearly called on teachers to be witnesses to the Christian message in order that this message could be presented to students as the Good News of Jesus Christ which forms the basis of the evangelization role of the school. This expectation of teachers also placed an obligation on the school to provide suitable support for the teachers in their personal development, so that they were better prepared for the task of living this role of witness. The school which was the focus of the study provided a number of opportunities each year for staff to explore the meaning of being a witness to the Catholic / Christian tradition as this role adapts to changes in the social, technological and spiritual nature of contemporary life.

### Summary Comments

This chapter has discussed some of the key findings from the previous two chapters which summarised the findings from the questionnaires and interviews of parents and teachers. The discussion showed that there were many aspects of religious education where teachers and parents were in mutual understanding and agreement. Both groups showed strong support for the Catholic school to be obviously Catholic in its statement of aims and in its practices within the curriculum, and in the establishment of a Catholic ethos within the school. The parents and teachers acknowledged the role of the school to proclaim the gospel (evangelisation) but were limited in their support of an overtly catechetical approach either within the religious education classroom or within other aspects of school

life. There was, however, support from both groups for opportunities for individual students to engage with the faith tradition and to thus build a faith response as a consequence of this freely chosen involvement with the Catholic faith tradition. There was also wide agreement that the religious education curriculum should present a range of theological, scriptural, moral, liturgical and spiritual material to students. This was so that the students should gain an understanding of these aspects of the Catholic tradition so as to more fully appreciate the nature of religion. This would then create a situation for them to choose to engage, or not, with these dimensions of the faith tradition in their own lives. The teachers were more active in their support for the assessment of the knowledge and skills associated with teaching these aspects of religion than were parents, who were more inclined to want their children to be exposed to the material and to be able to question and discuss it on a more personal level. Both parents and teachers hoped that religious education would be relevant for students and would help students to build a sense of meaning and identity as spiritual people capable of critiquing the values and morality within society and within religious traditions. In this, the data reflected Crawford and Rossiter's (2006) assertion that "Finding meaning in life and achieving some authentic sense of identity are key developmental tasks for adolescents." (p. xxii). The parents and the teachers did have differing views on the value of religious education in the upper secondary years where parents did not want religious education to interfere with academic studies in other subjects that would contribute to post-secondary school vocation or study options, while the teachers generally saw the students at this level as being ready for a more advanced exploration of religious matters. Both groups were in agreement on the role of retreats, seminars and community service at this level as a means of making religious education relevant to students.

The discussion showed that both teachers and parents saw the parent population as lacking knowledge about religious education, similarly with most other subjects within the school curriculum. It confirmed that parents do value religious education within the school, but that they do not want to become involved in a discussion of the content and methods of teaching religious education. This was seen by parents as the role of professional educators to whom the parents were prepared to delegate the responsibilities of leading their children in an exploration of the nature and practices of religion, particularly the Catholic tradition, but also exposure to other faith traditions. The school was seen to have a strong mandate to present material on morality and to encourage students to reflect on and clarify their own values and beliefs in relation to a range of ethical and spiritual aspects of contemporary life. From this perspective, the religious education teacher was seen as a vital element in the process of educating the children about religion in general and the Catholic tradition in particular. The teacher had a definite mandate from the Catholic Church to be a witness to the Catholic tradition by use of contemporary educationally sound methods and also by personal example of lived respect for the Catholic tradition.

The discussion showed that the current religious education curriculum *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) was not well known by parents who were equally uninformed about the SCP (Groome 1991) approach that formed the foundation of the classroom curriculum implementation. It was also noted that the teachers were not fully aware of, or confident in applying, the principles of *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) and SCP. This was consistent with parents leaving the teaching of curriculum to teachers, but did raise issues for teachers who were leading religious education classes.

Overall, the findings indicated strong parent support for religious education despite a lack of realisation of this support by teachers. It was evident that teachers were given a

mandate by parents to teach about the Catholic tradition, with some opportunity for students to develop an understanding of other religious traditions. It was a general reassurance for teachers that the parents were supportive of the efforts within the religious education classroom, but that the parents did not want the school to place strong demands upon them in relation to religious education, often as a consequence of parents perceiving that they had little knowledge of matters covered in the religious education curriculum. The parents also confirmed the teachers' views that the language used to discuss religious education needed to be kept relevant to the life experiences of the parents, as opposed to being highly influenced by ecclesial or theological constructs. This was critical in supporting the parents in understanding the curriculum and in engaging the parents in homework, discussion and other associated activities with students and teachers.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which parents and teachers understood the nature and purposes of religious education in the Catholic secondary school in which the research was conducted. The study explored how these understandings related to the official Catholic Church documents on religious education, and there was an examination of areas of agreement and difference between the views of the parents and teachers in the light of these documents. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gain insights from the parents and teachers about their understanding of religious education in the school. This investigation was framed within the CDB religious education guidelines, *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005), which was the main source of religious education curriculum in the school.

The study investigated whether parents and teachers in the particular Catholic secondary school agreed, disagreed or were uncertain about various aspects of religious education. Overall the data which was collected by interviews and questionnaires showed that there was general agreement on many aspects of the religious education curriculum across both groups. This agreement related to the overall intent of religious education as a subject designed to raise student consciousness of moral and religious matters as they were understood within the Roman Catholic tradition. It dispelled a perception of the teachers that parents were not interested in religious education or did not value religious education classes. The data from the parents decisively showed this to be incorrect. Similarly, parents showed that they valued the role of the religious education teachers and had high expectations regarding the example that they provided to the children in their care. These findings provided much needed positive reinforcement to the teachers, who experienced

difficulties in each religious education class with students who were not engaged, and with a related perception that parents did not encourage their children to value religious education. In the following sections of this chapter, the findings from each research question are analysed.

### Parents' and Teachers' Understandings of the Nature, Purposes and Goals of Religious Education

Both parents and teachers agreed with students having the opportunity to discuss personal responses to Church teachings and to explore the contemporary place and relevance of Church and religion in their society and the world. This agreement extended to teaching students about the core beliefs and common practices of the Catholic Church, including liturgy and prayer. It was also commonly agreed that religious education should extend student understanding and tolerance of other religious traditions, and there was a common desire for students to be given the opportunity to explore and develop their own spirituality and moral decision making. In addition, both groups agreed with student engagement in social justice theory and practice, as well as community service activity.

These findings were consistent with the normative Catholic Church documents which saw each of these dimensions of religious education as significant in the transmission of Church tradition and the foundations of Catholic theology and spirituality. There was parent-teacher agreement regarding the importance of each of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) strands: Jesus Christ, God, Church, Scripture, Sacraments, Christian Life, Christian Prayer, Religion and Society.

A further finding was the lack of familiarity of parents, and in some cases teachers, with the ecclesial and theological language of the Church and religious education generally. This made the documents difficult for parents and teachers to read and use. It

presented challenges to the school with regard to the ways in which the school communicated about religious education to the parents. The language generally used by parents was about the content of religious education, rather than about the possible benefits of religious education for their children. Teachers were similarly inclined to speak of the educational nature of religious education, without the specific expectations of religious education affecting faith development. The interviewed parents were more likely to hope that religious education would complement the family faith than were the teachers or the parents who completed questionnaires.

One of the major areas where parents and teachers disagreed was in the perceived value of religious education in the senior school, or final years of secondary school. The teachers wanted to see religious education given equal academic status including curriculum time with other subjects, but parents were more concerned about the outcomes of the final years in terms of providing their children with a platform for entering tertiary education or employment.

It was evident that few parents knew about the SCP approach to religious education adopted by the school, or about the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) program of the diocese and the school. This was consistent with a perceived lack of parental knowledge about what actually took place in religious education in the classroom and how students could benefit from the subject. Therefore the key findings that were related to the first research questions were:

- a) Parents and teachers shared many common understandings related to the nature, purposes and goals of religious education.
- b) These common understandings and expectations of religious education were consistent with the documents of the CDB, which reflected the expectations of religious education from the documents of the universal Catholic Church.

- c) There was a lack of familiarity with the ecclesial language of the Catholic Church in relation to the nature and purposes of religious education on the part of parents and to a lesser extent on the part of teachers.
- d) There was a major difference in the views of parents and teachers about the purposes and goals of religious education in the senior years of secondary school.
- e) There was a lack of knowledge on the part of parents about the details of the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum, and the SCP used within the school as the key learning structure in the school.

#### Teachers' and Parents' Understanding of the Complementary Role of School and Home in Young People's Religious Education

Teachers expressed a desire for a complementary relationship between school and home in religious education, but also expressed reservations about the openness of parents to such a situation. The teachers' desire for co-operation and a closer working relationship with home was supported by the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) documentation and by Church documents as explained in Chapter three of this thesis. The parents, on the other hand, expressed reservations about involvement in religious education and preferred to leave this to the school. It was explained by the interviewed parents as being because of parents' lack of expertise in the language and concepts of religious education and religion generally. The school and teachers were seen by parents as 'experts' to be supported at home, but to be left to do the teaching without contribution from the home. This was seen by parents, and teachers, as being similar to procedures in other subjects where the teachers were considered the experts and educational decisions were left to them. This desire to provide passive support from a distance was often interpreted by the teachers as a

lack of interest in and support for religious education by the majority of parents. This, however, was not the view of the parents who completed the questionnaires. These expressed strong support for the religious education curriculum, although they chose not to become personally involved because of lack of time or because they believed that they were inadequate, or they were uncomfortable when discussing religious education and religion generally. It was pointed out by many of the parents and teachers who were interviewed that estrangement from traditional religious involvement had contributed to the distancing of parents from the religious education of their children. Whether active in a religious community or not, the parents were still the first educators in faith of their children, with the school being a support in this development. Some teachers and parents argued however, that the parents were prepared to allow the school to provide religious knowledge and skills to students in a Christian environment, without family support or involvement in a religious tradition or community. Certain teachers expressed concern about this. In summary the findings that related to the second research question are presented below:

- a) The teachers in the study expressed a stronger desire for more evidence of parent involvement and interest in religious education than did the parents who were surveyed in questionnaires and interviews.
- b) Parents regarded the school as 'experts' in all subject areas, not just religious education, and subsequently preferred to leave the development of curriculum to the school.
- c) Teachers often interpreted the passive, but positive, support of parents as a lack of interest on behalf of parents to have a complementary role in the young people's religious education. The teachers sought greater feedback from parents in relation to the shared roles of school and family within the religious education of the children.

- d) The teachers who took part in the study believed that a lack of parental involvement in organised religion led to a distancing of the parents from an involvement in the religious education of their children, but parents supported the school and its religious education curriculum. Parents acknowledged and valued the role of the school as complementary to the family religious education of the children.

#### Engagement of Parents with the Religious Education processes of the School

Parents expressed the view that they were sufficiently well informed about religious education, even if they lacked knowledge about specific aspects of the curriculum. They expressed the desire to receive information about religious education in regular newsletters and to have access to website information, even though it was admitted that parents rarely used the website for school-related matters. Parents did not seek further opportunities for involvement in the religious education processes of the school, but were confident in leaving that to the expert teachers, as they did in other subjects. The parents and teachers provided few new ideas that could lead to greater parent involvement in the religious education of the school. There was an acceptance of the current situation as adequate and appropriate by parents, while teachers wanted greater involvement, or feedback, from parents. The teachers did not, however, have alternate ways of achieving this goal. In summary then, the findings that related to the third research question were:

- a) Parents expected regular updates and information about religious education from newsletters and on the school website.
- b) Few new ideas were presented by the parents or the teachers who took part in the study to improve communication about religious education between school and home.

- c) The current situation was seen by the teachers as less satisfactory than by the parents who were content with the current arrangements.

### Issues Arising from the Findings

This study raised a number of key issues that may provide an agenda for development for the school which was the focus of the study, and more broadly for Catholic education in Australia. It became clear that there was a need to develop a coherent understanding of the nature of religious education among parents and teachers. Despite the fact of a good deal of Australian literature on this in recent years (Engebretson, 2001, 2002, 2007; de Souza, 2003, 2006; Buchanan, 2003, 2007; Crawford and Rossiter, 1985, 1988, 2006; Rossiter, 1999, 2002, 2004; Rymarz, 2003; Ryan, 1997, 2006) this study has shown that this lack of a clear theory of religious education is apparently still a problem.

Related to this is the clear need to differentiate between the nature and outcomes of what might be termed 'school teaching' and 'family' or 'community teaching' (Crawford and Rossiter, 1986). The outcomes of these two forms of teaching are distinct, and parents and teachers would benefit from a clearer understanding of the realistic outcomes of both for students (Crawford and Rossiter, 1985, 2006). The essential distinction needs to be made between school religious education with its main focus on academic outcomes, but which also has a range of other outcomes in emotional, social, physical and spiritual dimensions of student development, and religious education which occurs in the family or community. Family or community teaching should be presented as having the primary responsibility for personal outcomes in terms of values, beliefs and religious practices. Confusion between school and family education results in many parents and teachers having conflicting or divergent views about religious education and its anticipated outcomes (Ryan, 2007).

The findings identified that the teachers strongly supported the view that religious education teachers should be witnesses to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. There was much higher teacher support for this expectation than there was from parents. The Church documents are clear in highlighting the role of the teacher as witnesses to the Christian faith (Paul VI, 1969; CCE, 1988; CCE, 1982), but there may be a lack of consistency among teachers as to the nature of this witnessing. The teachers were consistent in expecting that teachers of religious education should give moral witness to the teachings of Christ and the Church. All teachers in the school were expected, by teachers and parents, to support these moral values and of the Church. There was also the expectation that teachers of religious education should be practicing Catholics and involved in their local parish Church. This places great challenges for the school in finding committed Catholic teachers who are active in parish life to teach religious education. Teachers who do not have this commitment to Church life and tradition will find it hard to be a living witness to the Church, even if they are good teachers and present the curriculum content professionally. The personal witness of the Catholic teacher is a significant factor in the culture of the Catholic school.

A further issue was the need to clarify the meaning of the claim that parents have primary responsibility for the education of their children, and to examine this in light of the school situation (Crawford and Rossiter, 1986). Also arising from the study were issues related to the way that the school communicates with parents about religious education – the language and methods utilised to engage, involve and inform parents (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Rymarz, 2007). These and other issues emerged as central from this study and provide an ongoing challenge to the school in question and to Catholic education in Australia. Some proposals for how this must be more effectively done are provided in the following section.

## Recommendations for the School and Religious Education related to the Findings

This study raised the importance of clarifying the nature and purpose of religious education and therefore examining and clarifying the expectations about religious education for parents and teachers. This will help to reduce unrealistic expectations of the extent to which the school should be responsible for personal change in students (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). Therefore, the first recommendation is that parents need to be better informed about the nature and purpose of religious education in the school. To realize this aim, it is necessary to ascertain the current understanding of parents, with the explicit goal of building on this to create a broader and more informed perception of the religious education curriculum and what can realistically be expected of it. The complementary, but different, roles of the parents and teachers in religious education will need to be explicitly identified. While the role of the school is academically educational, with some opportunity for enhancing faith development, the role of parents is more in support and nurture of the young person's spirituality and, if appropriate, religious commitment. It is recommended that the school work on a process to arrive at this clarification.

In accord with this initial recommendation, the second recommendation is that upon enrolment of their child, the parents should be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire focusing on the nature and purpose of religious education. This would be passed on to the Director of Religious Education [DRE] for collation with other questionnaires from that time. Thus, there would be a process for constant updating of the data gathered for this study, and this would provide a profile of the views of parents of students entering the secondary school each year. There would need to be a limited number of items and the language and format would need to respect the findings above about parents and the language often associated with religious education. This would enable the school and diocese to gather data every year to monitor trends, which could

indicate key areas for working with parents, and for the establishment of diocesan priorities in parent education.

In addition the school could take this opportunity to inform parents about the theory and practice of religious education held in the school. This recommendation will assist in clarifying issues surrounding parents having the primary responsibility for the education of their children. There is a need to clearly identify that parents do not have responsibility for, or influence over, the curriculum of the school, as this is the domain of the professional educators. This does not remove parents from consultation and engagement in the process of curriculum development, but it takes away the expectation of teachers that parents should be more involved in curriculum issues. Parents in this study acknowledged their lack of expertise in curriculum and expressed the desire for the 'expert' school staff to address these issues. The responsibility of the school is to inform parents of general issues and to provide the means by which parents can access details of the curriculum, in order to more fully understand religious education in the school and to therefore more actively support the classroom program from home.

Teachers should, therefore, be better informed of the distinction between the roles of parents and teachers. This would alleviate some of the stress experienced and expressed by teachers in relation to the perceived non-involvement of parents in religious education in the school. Parents need to be informed about religious education and other subjects within the secondary school such as Mathematics, English, Science and the Arts. This, again, does not imply that parents determine the curriculum, but that they are offered the opportunity for information about the subjects. There may be ways in which parents can be involved in adapting the broader curriculum to local conditions. The parents who took part in this study made it clear that they were concerned about the nature and priority of religious education in the senior school years.

Therefore, a third recommendation is that all parents in the school need to be made aware of the expectations of the school about religious education in all year levels, and most importantly about the reasons for this according to the school's goals, mission statement and ethos. This must be clearly articulated, in language that is constructive, that does not set up a climate of dissension, and that is appropriate for parents. It should also include an introduction for parents to the key policy documents of the school. This communication may take place at the point of initial enrolment and then be reinforced each year when students re-enrol.

In addition, the policy should be given prominence on the school website. Interested parents should be engaged in the drafting of the school documentation given to parents about religious education, to ensure that they take into account the concerns of parents. This should include a presentation to parents by current or past parents and students, explaining the benefits and aspirations of religious education in the school. Parental and student perspectives on religious education would, therefore, be given prominence as part of the introductory information session for prospective parents and students. This would be appropriate for students entering junior and senior levels within the school.

One of the main means used by teachers to gauge parental interest in religious education was the end of semester parent-teacher interviews. It is a fourth recommendation of this study that teachers need to be aware that low parent attendance at parent-teacher interviews for religious education does not imply a failure by the school to engage parents in religious education. The limited parent use of these opportunities for engagement with religious education teachers was seen by the teachers as a reflection of low interest in religious education, but not so by parents themselves. The parents simply noted that they did not have the need to discuss the progress of their children in religious

education or were uncomfortable talking about the religious concepts involved.

Contemporary lifestyles were seen by parents as pressuring them to make priorities about their time and energies.

The teachers need to be made aware that the parents supported a diverse set of expectations regarding religious education, which included theology, Church history and teachings, moral and spiritual nurturing and the provision of liturgy and prayer experiences for students. With this in mind, it is a fifth recommendation that the school needs to make it known to the school staff that religious education is valued by parents and that teachers are supported – in spirit, if not in an overt show of involvement in meetings, or in contributions towards religious education in other forums. This is an extremely important finding, with its related recommendation, given that many teachers argued that religious education was a very poor cousin to more ‘academic’ subjects such as mathematics, science and English, because they are linked to post-secondary school educational and vocational transition. The results of this study allow teachers in classrooms to expect that the parents of the children support them in the religious education curriculum, but that these parents do not want to become actively involved in the school-based process themselves. Of course, the findings of this research have indicated that parents in general are reluctant to become closely involved in curriculum in any subject.

The teachers need to be clear in their own minds that the development of a ‘religious’ identity in the students is a hope rather than an imperative of the religious education curriculum. The knowledge and skills developed in the classroom may be nurtured in the home in a particular religious tradition or possibly will find resonance within the liturgy, service or other ethos dimensions of the total school experience of the child.

It is a sixth recommendation that the whole teaching staff should be made aware of the range of other aspects of the religious education program at the senior level such as

retreats, seminar days, community service and liturgies which were highly valued by parents as integral to the spiritual development of their children. As many of the staff members not in the religious education faculty often view these activities as unwanted interruptions to the teaching of other subjects, it must be advertised to staff that parents have noted that these non-classroom activities are highly valued. Therefore, beyond the religious education faculty, it is important that the entire staff in the school be made aware of the nature and purposes of religious education, with particular attention to the academic outcomes expected from the curriculum, to raise the profile of religious education among staff. The whole staff of the school in the study should to be informed of the expectations of the parents in the study in relation to the ethos and general character of the school, with particular reference to the role that each staff member plays in relation to the way that this ethos is lived within the school community. All staff members need to be made aware of their responsibility to support and inform about the religious education curriculum whenever possible.

A seventh recommendation is that the school devise a plan for showing parents that religious education in the senior school classroom program is important in a variety of ways to the students' holistic development. Although this is difficult when parents do not attend meetings about religious education, the school has the opportunity to engage parents by regular newsletters, interactive website development – as parents expressed an interest (as yet unfulfilled) to use the school website for interacting with the school about curriculum issues in religious education, and other subjects. The school also has an opportunity to fully utilise those aspects valued by parents such as retreats and service activities to more fully link with other aspects of the religious education curriculum and to highlight the expectations and outcomes of such activities in relation to *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005). This will result in creating a more complete understanding of religious education

as based in outcomes similar to other academic subjects, but will illustrate the possibilities for support of the personal developments of students initiated at home.

This lack of parental knowledge about religious education could be addressed through the production and distribution of information for parents via a range of electronic and printed means such as regular inserts in the newsletters; a Digital Video Disk [DVD] showing the school as a whole, but having a thread within the presentation showing a range of aspects of the religious education curriculum in action; monthly emails to work / home (parent preference determined first); text messages about important events related to religious education during the year; podcasts of information that would normally be delivered at parent-teacher meetings, so that parents can access these from the school website at their convenience. There could then be a gradual exposure to more formal language in specific situations as required; through invitation to parents to find out about particular aspects of religious education relevant to their children; or within debates on contemporary issues. The use of theological language was noted as a major issue for the school. The parents' responses to the questionnaires clearly indicated that many parents are uncomfortable with, and lack understanding of, ecclesial or theological language generally. This must be kept in mind during all parent information sessions – parent seminar sessions, written materials for parents, website pages, and all other newsletters and parent communication. The concepts and issues need to be raised and discussed, but the language used needs to be carefully chosen so that the parents are not made to see themselves as inferior, or that they are turned off due to ecclesial language.

A continuation of this recommendation is that the school should more effectively inform parents about the VCE religious education units and the fact that these units can contribute to the ENTER score for tertiary study. This would help to make religious education a more academically attractive option at the senior levels of the school and assist

teachers to believe that their teaching of religious education at these levels is more highly valued by parents.

It is also a recommendation that the school make a concerted effort to encourage /or invite parent participation in liturgies as a means of commencing their engagement with matters religious, including religious education. Some of these liturgies could be in 'out of working hours' times to make it easier for parents to participate. The school needs to be very careful when expecting parents to participate in religious education homework. No assumptions can be made regarding religious knowledge or personal experience directly related to religious education or involvement in a religious tradition. By constantly inviting, and providing opportunities for, engagement with religious education, the school may assist the parents to grow in knowledge about religious education. This improved knowledge will lead to better appreciation of the subject and its academic nature.

The study showed that the religious education teachers were in need of further education about the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum. In response to this finding, it is a recommendation that all religious education teachers undergo further in-servicing in the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) curriculum. This is to be both theoretical – particularly dealing with the SCP approach to classroom teaching, and practical – planning units using the SCP approach as year level groups of teachers. The teachers are expected to fully utilize the on-line planning tools of *Awakenings* (CDB,2005), and, as such, require sound understanding of the SCP approach within the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) schema.

The findings indicated that both experienced and teachers new to religious education had similar concerns about teaching religious education and similar expectations of religious education. Therefore, it is noted that when new teachers commence in the school they are generally overwhelmed with the demands of classroom management and the establishment of relationships with staff and students to have sufficient time to develop

units of work and to build an awareness of the foundational principles of the curriculum, in this case the *Awakenings* (CDB, 2005) religious education curriculum. Many Catholic rural schools are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit teaching staff, especially teachers with graduate and post-graduate qualifications, to teach religious education.

With this in mind, it is a recommendation that the Catholic universities, who prepare many of the teachers for Catholic schools, work closely with the dioceses to ensure that the students are prepared with the relevant curriculum documentation of *Awakenings* (CDB,2005), as this has the same underlying principles and SCP approach employed in all dioceses of country Victoria and in Tasmania. Similarly, it is important for the Diocese of Ballarat, and other dioceses offering similar religious education curricula, to conduct a training program early in the first year of teaching religious education to assist the teachers to build an understanding of the key principles of the diocesan program. The REC in each school needs to be given time to work with the new religious education teachers to ensure that they are comfortable and supported in their teaching of the curriculum. This should become an ongoing educational process for all religious education teachers. This recommendation should be implemented across all Catholic secondary schools in the diocese to ensure that all new religious education teachers are supported, and that they receive the same message about the nature of the curriculum. This complements the previous work done with existing staff on *Awakenings* (v2005) and therefore makes it easier for other staff in the school to help the new teachers to handle the details of the individual school's adaptation of the curriculum in the units of work being taught at each year level.

Overall, the teachers can now be more at ease with the feedback which showed that most of the parents in the study were in favour of the moral, theological, ecclesial, spiritual and liturgical aspects of the school's religious education curriculum. Teachers need to be

made aware that parents often do not have the language or experience to comfortably discuss these topics with teachers or their children. The lack of parental involvement in a specific religious community limits their awareness of the constructs and practices associated with organised religion, but it does not detract from their desire for good religious education for their children.

#### The Limitations of this Research and the Contribution that it makes to Catholic Education

The research presented in this thesis is one of a limited number of investigations into the perceptions of parents regarding the nature and purposes of religious education and the perceived role of parents in Catholic secondary school religious education. The study identified a number of areas in which parents and teachers expressed agreement about religious education, but also identified a number of areas in which these parents and teachers diverged in their views about specific aspects of the religious education curriculum and the expectations of parents regarding the religious education offered by the school.

The 76 parents and 17 teachers who responded to the questionnaires, and the 16 parents and 14 teachers who were interviewed could be viewed as limiting the significance of the research. The questionnaires attracted about 30% of parents and 100% of the teachers were involved. The interviews involved far fewer parents and may not have represented the breadth of views among the entire parent cohort, although many of the parents expressed views that showed that they were aware of a wide range of parent perspectives. Again, nearly all teachers participated in the interviews. Despite this, it is claimed that the study has real value because of the fact that it has researched an aspect of religious education to which very little attention has been given. It is, therefore, claimed that it is an important introductory study.

The study focused on one school and may arguably have limited application across the Ballarat Diocese or within other Catholic school systems. However, many of the features of this school are similar to other regional Catholic secondary schools in Victoria, and as such the findings may reflect similar settings elsewhere in the state. The Ballarat Diocese has recently begun planning for a Catholic identity research program to be initiated in the near future across the diocese. The identity initiative should complement the research of this study in developing a profile of adult views on matters related to religious education. This research showed a link between attitudes to religious education and those to religion generally and, as such, may be able to be compared with the data in a further diocesan study.

#### Further Research Topics which may follow from this Study

As a result of this study, it would be of value to the Diocese of Ballarat, and other dioceses, to conduct similar research into the perceptions of parents and teachers in relation to the nature and purposes of religious education in secondary schools. This would provide a broader picture of the parental and teacher expectations across a range of regional and metropolitan schools in the Diocese of Ballarat, and beyond. It would provide data to support the development of parents' programs across Catholic education in Australia and would assist in tailoring teacher professional development to the actual needs of teachers. The universities would also gain knowledge of the anticipated parent body of beginning teachers and be able to use this in teacher preparation and development programs. There would also be insights into the current views of teachers of religious education which would inform course design for post-graduate and on-going teacher education.

In conclusion, this introductory study has provided valuable knowledge about teachers, parents and religious education, and the relationships between these, based on one rural Catholic secondary school. It is the hope of the researcher that other researchers will find in this study the impetus to take the issues that it raises further. Parents are an integral partner in secondary schools, but in the main they are a silent partner. It is hoped that research in the future will further assist families to become better informed about secondary school religious education and that there will be further research into how parents and teachers can be more active in support of each other in the development of the students at secondary schools. It is also hoped that further research will investigate the way that parents perceive the relevance of religious education in the senior years of secondary schooling at Catholic schools.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A 2008 Religious Affiliation Census

Appendix B Past and Current Enrolments for the School in the Study

Appendix C Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Form

Appendix D Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents

Part A – Parents

Part A – Teachers

Part B – [Parents and Teachers]

Appendix E Letters for Teachers and Parents re Interviews and Questionnaires

Appendix F Questions for Interviews – Parents and Teachers

## Appendix A

### 2008 Religious Affiliation Census

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Totals	%
<b>Religious Denomination</b>								
Anglican	9	11	12	11	8	1	52	6.62
Assembly of God			1				1	0.13
Baptist		1	1		2		4	0.52
Buddhism		1	1	1			3	0.39
Roman Catholic	88	84	94	85	84	62	497	63.31
Church of Christ		2	1	1			4	0.52
Greek Orthodox	2		2	2	4		10	1.27
Lutheran	3	1	4	2	4	2	16	2.04
Methodist / Wesleyan	2	2	2	2			8	1.02
Muslim	2	4	5	3	4	3	21	2.68
No religion	24	13	12	15	11	7	82	10.45
Other Orthodox		2					2	0.26
Other Christian	6	6	9	10	2	6	39	4.97
Other non-Christian					1	1	2	0.26
Presbyterian		1		1		2	4	0.52
Pentecostal					1		1	0.13
Russian Orthodox				1			1	0.13
Seventh Day Adventist		1		2		1	4	0.52
Uniting Church	2	5	6	5	10	6	34	4.33
					<b>Total in school</b>		<b>785</b>	

## Appendix B

### PAST AND CURRENT ENROLMENTS FOR THE SCHOOL IN THE STUDY

YEAR LEVEL	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009 (est.)
YEAR 7	136	159	166	142	160	180.4	155	166	191	144.2	153	139 (138.2)	135	125
YEAR 8	150	134	156	162	141	161	181	162	164	188	143 (142.2)	151	136 (135.2)	140
YEAR 9	145	147	137	150	163	138	163	178	165	164	184	144 (143.2)	153	133
YEAR 10	122	127	130	130	137	152	125	160	169	163	154	184	143 (142.2)	145
YEAR 11	76	102	83	110	106	102	109	61	117	132	119	109	137	130
YEAR 12	65	74	89	69	96	86.2	88	105	61.2	97	111	108	92	120
TOTAL	694	743	761	763 (762.4)	803 (801.9)	819.6	821 (820.4)	832 (830.6)	868 (867.2)	889 (888.2)	864 (863.2)	835 (833.4)	796 (794.4)	793

## Appendix C



### Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Dr Kath Engrebretson Melbourne Campus  
**Co-Investigators:** Prof. Graham Rossiter Melbourne Campus  
**Student Researcher:** Anthony Finn Melbourne Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**  
Investigation of parental and school perceptions of the nature and purpose of religious education in a catholic secondary school in regional Victoria.  
**for the period:** 01/01/06 to 01/09/06  
**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V200506 7

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ..... Date: .....01/01/06.....  
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

## **Appendix D**

### Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents

This includes:

- Parents' Questionnaire Part A – completed by parents only
- Teachers' Questionnaire Part A – completed by teachers only
- Part B – completed by parents and teachers

## Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents

Part A was different for the Teachers and the Parents, but Part B was the same. Part A is given for both groups followed by Part B after the Parents questionnaire in this Appendix.

### Teacher Survey Questionnaire

**Thank you for completing this survey and please post it in the post-paid envelope or deliver it to the collection box in the office at St Joseph's College. Your efforts are very much appreciated by the College and Mr. Tony Finn, Director of Religious Education.**

THE RESPONSES TO THIS SURVEY ARE TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL. NO PERSON WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITH ANY RESPONSE. THE RESPONSES WILL BE USED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY AND THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RESEARCH. COMPLETING THIS SURVEY WILL ASSIST THE SCHOOL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

### Part A

1. For how many years have you taught religious education?  
A. 0-2 years      B. 2-5 years      C. 5-10 years      D. more than 10 years
2. I have professional qualifications in religious education.  
A. Yes      B. No      [If No go to question 4]
3. What is your highest level of qualification in religious education at tertiary level:  
A. Diploma of Ed (A.C.U.)      B. Certificate level RE      C. Grad Dip RE      D. Masters RE/Theology
4. I have a strong level of satisfaction teaching religious education.  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree
5. Parents value what is done in religious education.  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

6. Parents have a good knowledge of what is done in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

7. Parents have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

8. Teachers have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in religious education

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

9. Parents expect religious education to get children to attend Sunday Mass.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

10. Religious education teachers expect religious education to get children to attend Sunday Mass.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

11. The RE teacher should be a witness to the faith of the Catholic Church.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**How well do the following religious terms help you to understand the purposes of religious education?**

12.      Catechesis      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

13.      Evangelisation      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

14.      Witnessing      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

15. Inculturation 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

16. Ministry 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

17. Mission 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not helpful    Unsure    Possibly useful    Helpful    Very helpful

18. The various religious terms noted above [12-17] are generally confusing for teachers.  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

19. The various religious terms noted above [12-17] are generally confusing for parents.  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

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B.58

Doing this questionnaire has been useful in helping me to think about the nature and purpose of religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

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**Parents and religious education at school**

8. Parents value what is done in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

9. Parents have a good knowledge of what is done in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

10. I know very little about the religious education offered by the school.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

11. It is very difficult to know how parents might be involved in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

12. There should be more opportunities to involve parents in religious education through the year.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

13. Parents need to attend parent-teacher interviews with the religious education teacher as often as with other teachers.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

14. What happens in religious education at school is often discussed at home.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Questions 15-21 are possible ways of better involving parents in religious education in the school. Indicate how helpful this suggestion would be to you:**

15. A summary of the religious education program in a mail out to parents.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

16. A detailed account of what is happening in religious education at a parent-teacher night.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

17. Parents could meet each semester to discuss the religious education program at year levels.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

18. The school newsletter should have regular updates on what is happening in religious education at each level.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

19. The religious education curriculum should be easily accessible for parents on the school website.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

20. Parents could be involved in the planning of religious education with teachers.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

21. Parents should be able to examine the texts used in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

**Expectations of religious education**

22. Parents have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

23. Teachers have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in religious education

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

24. Parents expect religious education to get children to attend Sunday Mass.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

5

25. Religious education teachers expect religious education to get children to attend Sunday Mass.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Uncertain    Agree    Strongly agree

26. I am happy with what we know about religious education at the school.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

27. The school is the only way my child experiences the Catholic Church.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

28. Having religious education was important in the decision to send our son/daughter to this school.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

29. The RE teacher should be a witness to the faith of the Catholic Church.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**How well do the following religious terms help you understand the purposes of religious education?**

30.      Catechesis      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpfu

31.      Evangelisation      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

32.      Witnessing      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

33.      Inculturation      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

34.      Ministry      1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Very helpful    Helpful    Possibly useful    Unsure    Not helpful

35. Mission 1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5  
Very helpful Helpful Possibly useful Unsure Not helpful

36. I find that the various religious terms noted above [30-35] are generally confusing for parents.

1\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_5  
Strongly disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly agree

## **Part B**

This survey is divided into sections with questions on similar themes.

### **Whether the subject of religious education should be optional or compulsory**

1. Religious education should be compulsory in years 7 to 10.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

2. In Years 11,12 religious education should be optional for Students.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

3. Masses and prayer services conducted in the religious education class should be compulsory.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

4. Masses and prayer services for the whole school, should be compulsory.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

5. Students who are not Catholic should have the option of not attending Mass

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

### **Content of religious education curriculum relating to Christian and Catholic tradition**

6. Students should have detailed knowledge of the teachings and practice of the Catholic faith by the end of their schooling.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

7. Students should be able to discuss their own understandings and reactions to teachings of the Church.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

8. Students should be able to discuss the place and relevance of the Church in society today.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

9. The history of Christianity and the Catholic Church is important in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

10. Religious education should provide opportunities for students to express their feelings about issues.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

11. Students should be encouraged to memorise Catholic doctrine and moral codes like the commandments.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

12. Religious education should teach about Catholic moral values.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

13. Religious education should teach about sin and what is right and wrong from the viewpoint of Catholic teaching.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

14. Religious education should include teaching about Jesus and his role in salvation.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

15. Religious education should make students better Catholics.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

### **Implications for religious education beyond the school community**

16. Students should have some experience of community service within religious education classes.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

17. Religious education should address social justice issues with students.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

18. One of the main aims of religious education is to promote involvement of students in the parish.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

19. Whether or not a young person attends Mass on Sunday depends on more than what happens in religious education classes.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Content of religious education curriculum relating to non-Catholic traditions**

20. Students should have the opportunity to learn about other Christian religious traditions.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

21. Students should have the opportunity to learn about non-Christian religious traditions.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

22. A study of other religions can help students to become more accepting of other religious traditions.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

23. A study of other religions can help students to better appreciate their own religion.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Sacraments, prayer and liturgies**

24. Religious education should provide opportunity for participation in the sacraments of the Catholic Church – Reconciliation, Eucharist (Mass).

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

25. Students should have the experience of meditation in religious education classes.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

26. Religious education should give students the experience of different types of prayer practices.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

27. Students should learn traditional prayers of the Christian tradition.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Bible and student texts in religious education**

28. Students should be taught about the stories of the biblical heroes.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

29. Students should have knowledge of Jesus and his teaching from the bible.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

30. Students should learn how to interpret the bible in light of modern biblical scholarship.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

31. Each student should receive a bible at the commencement of Year 7 in religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

32. There should be a standard religious education text used at each year level.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**The status of religious education as an academic subject in the school curriculum**

33. Religious education should have assessment tasks like every other subject.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

34. Students should be tested on their knowledge of the Catholic faith and Christian traditions.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

35. Religious education should be as academically challenging as other subjects.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

36. Religious education should have homework.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

37. Parents should be involved in religious education homework.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

38. Having a VCE subject Religion and Society in Years 10,11, 12, increases the academic status of religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

39. All students in Years 11 and 12 should study at least one VCE religious education unit.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

40. There should there be another RE unit offered at VCE that is specifically more Catholic than the current VCE units.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

41. The status of religious education is generally low in the opinion of students.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

42. The status of religious education is generally low in the opinion of parents.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Religious education, personal faith and searching for meaning in life**

43. Religious education should help students to think about meaning and purpose in life.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

44. Religious education should help students to draw on the Catholic tradition in constructing their own personal meaning.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

45. 45. Religious education should enhance the spirituality of students whether or not they become active members of a parish.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

46. Religious education should help to develop the spirituality of students.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

47. Religious education should help students to develop their personal faith.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

48. In religious education, students should become familiar with Catholic tradition in order that they may develop a personal Christian faith later in life.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**The current religious education curriculum**

49. I know about the Shared Christian Praxis approach to teaching religious education.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

50. I know a lot about the *Awakenings* religious education curriculum used at school.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Religious education helping students to become critical thinkers and to make judgments about culture and society**

51. Religious education should help students to think critically about religion and religious issues.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

52. The religious education curriculum should help students to critically evaluate contemporary spiritual and moral issues.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

53. Students should be able to see the positive and negative influences that religion can have on people's lives.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

54. Students should become aware of the issues surrounding fundamentalism, cults and sects.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

55. Students should learn about religious conflicts and persecutions in the world today and in history.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

56. Students should be able to evaluate the positive and negative impact of religion on society.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

57. religious education should help students to become aware of cultural influences on people's values and behaviour.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      Uncertain      Agree      Strongly agree

**Other comments about religious education in the school:**

**[You are welcome to contact Mr. Tony Finn at St Joseph's College if you would like to discuss any matters further.]**

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## **Appendix E**

The following pages contain copies of the information letters that were sent to all parents of Years 7 and 12 students and to all teachers of religious education regarding the questionnaires and interviews conducted within this research.



Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

Australian Catholic University Limited  
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115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065 Australia  
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www.acu.edu.au

## **INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** INVESTIGATION OF PARENTAL AND SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

**NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KATH ENGBRETSON, PROFESSOR GRAHAM ROSSITER, MR TONY FINN

Dear Parents

You are invited to take part in a research project which will provide information about the ways in which parents and Catholic secondary schools can better communicate regarding religious education. The research focuses on the various perceptions that teachers and parents have about religious education. Your responses to these issues will be recorded in one questionnaire. This process should take around 20 minutes of your time.

There are no risks to you and you will be asked only to complete one questionnaire which accompanies this letter.

Your participation will help researchers to make recommendations for Catholic schools, teachers and parents in developing greater communication between parents and teachers about religious education. It will provide Catholic schools with information about what parents hope will be offered in religious education.

You are not obliged to take part and if you choose not to, you do not need to give a reason. You will never be identified in any material that is produced as a result of this research. Your participation is confidential.

As parents of students at a Catholic secondary school, your contribution to this research is highly respected and your participation, if you so choose, will provide valuable data for both future planning in religious education and in assessing the current situation.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to St Joseph's College either by the pre-paid postal envelope or by handing the envelope to the office staff at the College by Friday, May 26.

If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Principal Investigator:

Dr Kath Engebretson  
St. Patrick's campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Pde  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065.

After the whole research project has been completed, the school will receive a report on all the findings, which may then be shared with the school community at the discretion of the Principal.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University. If you have any complaints or concerns about the way you have been treated during the research, or if you have any questions that the researchers have not been able to answer, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Manager, Research Services  
St Patrick's campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Pde  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065.  
Phone 9953 3251  
Fax: 99533315

Any complaint or concern will be confidential, will be fully investigated, and the person who complained will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate you should sign both copies of the Consent form, keep one copy for your own records and give the other copy to the researcher.

With thanks:



Associate Professor Kath Engebretson: Principal Investigator.



ACU

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## INFORMATION LETTER TO TEACHERS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** INVESTIGATION OF PARENTAL AND SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

**NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KATH ENGEBRETSON, PROFESSOR GRAHAM ROSSITER, MR TONY FINN

Dear Religious Education Teacher

You are invited to take part in a research project which will provide information about the ways in which parents and Catholic secondary schools can better communicate regarding religious education. The research focuses on the various perceptions that teachers and parents have about religious education. Your responses to these issues will be recorded in one questionnaire. This process should take around 20 minutes of your time.

There are no risks to you and you will be asked only to complete one questionnaire which accompanies this letter.

Your participation will help researchers to make recommendations for Catholic schools, teachers and parents in developing greater communication between parents and teachers about religious education. It will provide Catholic schools with information about what teachers hope will be offered in religious education.

You are not obliged to take part and if you choose not to, you do not need to give a reason. You will never be identified in any material that is produced as a result of this research. Your participation is confidential.

As teachers of religious education at a Catholic secondary school, your contribution to this research is highly respected and your participation, if you so choose, will provide valuable data for both future planning in religious education and in assessing the current situation.

Please complete the questionnaire enclosed and return it via the pre-paid envelope or return it to the office staff at the College by Friday, May 26.

If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Principal Investigator:

Associate Profesor Kath Engebretson  
St.Patrick's campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Pde  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065.

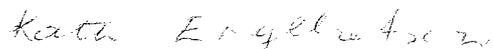
After the whole research project has been completed, the school will receive a report on all the findings, which may then be shared with the school community at the discretion of the Principal.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University. If you have an complaints or concerns about the way you have been treated during the research, or if you have any questions that the researchers have not been able to answer, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Manager, Research Services  
St Patrick's campus  
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Phone 9953 3251  
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Any complaint or concern will be confidential, will be fully investigated, and the person who complained will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate you should sign both copies of the Consent form, keep one copy for your own records and give the other copy to the researcher.

With thanks:



Associate Professor Kath Engebretson: Principal Investigator.



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[www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au)

Dear Parents

This is your chance to have a real input into how the College and parents can work together better.

The surveys that many parents completed earlier in the year showed up a range of interesting views about how parents see religious education and what you want in RE.

Now is your chance to build on this by volunteering for an interview, even if you did not complete the survey, so that the data collection can be completed and the findings can be used in planning for 2007. The interviews will help to explain some of the reasons behind what parents said about RE.

Some of the interesting topics to be included in interviews are about community service; compulsory RE at senior levels; how RE can help students to be able to make judgments about what is right and wrong in their society; learning about other religions.

There are no risks to you and you will be asked only to participate in an interview which will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. In this interview you will be completely free to respond to questions presented to you or to choose to not respond to any or all of the questions. The interview can be done by phone or in person to suit you.

Please contact Mr Tony Finn on 50188070 or [tfinn@sjcmnda.vic.edu.au](mailto:tfinn@sjcmnda.vic.edu.au) for more information and Tony will be in touch. Please consider this as a service to the school and know that your efforts are greatly appreciated by the school and Tony who is completing this research study.

You and the school will never be identified in any material that is produced as a result of this research. Your participation is confidential.

If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Principal Investigator:

Dr Kath Engebretson  
St.Patrick's campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Pde  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065.

After the whole research project has been completed, the school will receive a report on all the findings, which may then be shared with the school community at the discretion of the Principal.

## Appendix F

### Questions for Interviews – Parents and Teachers

#### Parent Questions

The following questions are being asked as a follow up to the surveys distributed to parents of Year 7 and 12 students. Please feel free to respond or Pass [not respond] to any question. Do you have any questions before we commence?

1. Do you have a student in early secondary or late secondary school?
2. Is Religious Education an area of special interest to you?
3. Would you describe yourself as a regular church-goer or active member of a religious community?
4. In the survey results, most parents felt uncomfortable with the language such as evangelisation, catechesis, mission and ministry when used to talk about religious education.  
Is this what you would expect? Why?
5. Most parents did not want more input into RE in the school. Why do you think is the case?
6. In the survey a majority of parents suggested that VCE RE be optional. Why do you think that this was the response?
7. The survey showed that parents saw RE as less of an academic subject than other curriculum areas and that the assessment for RE should be less academic.  
Could you offer any reasons for this response?
8.
  - a. RE is seen by some to have a major role to provide information about the students' own religion. How important is this?
  - b. RE is seen by some to have a major role in helping students to learn how to identify and deal with moral issues to do with what is right and wrong. How valuable is this for students?
  - c. RE is seen by some to have a special role in helping students to develop a spiritual dimension in their lives. How important is this?
9. The survey noted that religious education should encourage students to look carefully at the values that underpin consumer society.  
What benefits would this bring for students?  
Is this what you would expect of religious education? Why/Why not?

10. In the survey, 7% of surveys were filled in by males alone compared to 79% by females alone.  
Why would there be so few males completing the surveys?  
Are males not interested?  
Do females take on the education responsibilities?
11. Most parents saw RE as an important part of their choice of secondary school. Why?
12. The survey showed that parents were likely to say that they value RE. Can you suggest reasons for this?
13. Most parents felt that the RE teacher should be living examples of the Catholic faith. Is this important to you? Why/Why not?
14. The use of the College newsletter and website were seen by most parents as better ways of communicating about RE compared to meetings. Would you agree? Why?
15. If parents have unreal expectations for RE, what could these expectations be?
16. 25% of parents thought that Mass attendance should be optional for non-Catholic students. Would you like to see Mass optional? Reasons

## Teacher Questions

1. Most parents felt uncomfortable with the language/vocabulary used to talk about religious education; such as evangelisation, catechesis, ministry.  
Does this surprise you?  
Why do you think this might be the case?  
What impact could this have on the way that the school communicates about RE?
2. Most parents did not want more input into RE in the school. What does this mean for the RE program and teachers?
3. In the survey, a majority of parents suggested that VCE RE be optional. Why do you think this was the case? What impact would this have on the RE in the school? Do you agree?
4. The survey showed that parents saw RE as less of an academic subject than other curriculum areas and that the assessment for RE should be less academic.  
If this was adopted, how do you think this would affect RE?
5.
  - a. RE was seen by some to have a major role to provide information about the students' own religious tradition. How important is this?
  - b. RE was seen by some to have a major role in helping students to learn how to identify and deal with moral issues. Why would this be seen as a valuable aspect of RE?
  - c. RE is seen by some to have a special role in helping students to develop a spiritual dimension in their lives. How important is this?
6. In the survey, 7% of surveys were filled in by males alone compared to 79% by females alone.  
Why would there be so few males completing the surveys?  
In your experiences of dealing with parents, do females take the leading role?
  - b. How much do you deal with parents in RE? When and how does this take place?
7. The survey noted that religious education should encourage students to look carefully at the values that underpin consumer society.
  - a. What role does RE have in encouraging students to critique society?
  - b. What role does RE have in developing an awareness of what is held as sacred in society and why this is so?
8. Most parents saw RE as an important part of their choice of secondary school.  
What does this mean for you as an RE teacher?
9. In the survey, only 41% teachers were likely to say that parents value RE. Can you suggest reasons for this?

10. Most teachers felt that the RE teacher should be a witness to the Catholic faith. What does this say to you as a teacher?
11. What benefits would come for you as an RE teacher from parents having a better understanding of what the school is doing in RE?
12. The use of the College newsletter and website were seen by most parents as the best means of communicating about RE. Would this affect how you communicate with parents?
13. Teachers were unanimous in disagreeing with optional Mass attendance for non-Catholic students. Why is this unacceptable?

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