

August 2019

## A Message from the EREA Executive Director

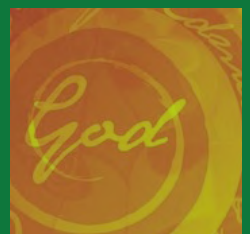
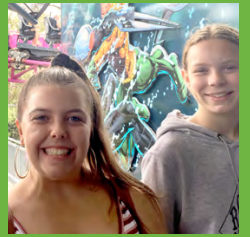
Dear Friends and Colleagues,

In a recent conversation with a teacher in a Catholic school, he revealed to me that he sometimes felt like an imposter or fraud. When I asked him why, he told me that he was a teacher of religious education and thought that he did a fair job; but, nagging at him, was a sense that his personal religious/spiritual journey had moved on and took him in different directions to those that he addressed on a daily basis in his religious education program. He somehow felt that he was being disloyal for thinking differently.

Many people who will read this letter are not teachers of religious education. We are communities where people have many and diverse views on religion, spirituality and the church. Many are struggling to reconcile forms of religion that they were taught in their youth with the insights into a personal spirituality that open exploration and advancement in years can bring. Some may have found inspiration in other traditions. Some are angry and disillusioned at the church, while others are passionate about its future and the place of our young people in its ranks. Many are inspired by the person and teaching of Jesus, but struggle with the way the church has failed to fulfil its role as the embodiment of Jesus' teaching. Some are inspired by our justice tradition, but struggle with the liturgical life and certain moral teachings in the church tradition.

My sense would be that most of us would find something in the above description reflective of where we stand in our individual life and spiritual journeys. We are a diverse community, reflective of our Australian society.

If I can see myself somewhere in the above descriptions, how do I feel about my responsibilities as a staff member in a Catholic school? How can I deal with potential feelings that I am somehow 'disloyal' or don't fit a certain mould? How does our diversity as an education community positively contribute to the formation of our young?



Clearly, not all staff members in Catholic schools need to believe the same things, worship in the same communities or see religion and spirituality in the same way. Even if we think that this would be helpful, and that this uniformity of belief was the way the Catholic world was in times past, when we look at the current reality of faith and spirituality in our society, it would appear that it didn't work. My strong sense is that, just as we have, our current generation of young people will also develop diverse and varying insights into religion and spirituality as they themselves advance in years and life experience. This is the spiritual quest!

So, what is essential and enduring in our role as educators and agents of formation for the young people in our Catholic schools?

For me, regardless of where we are in our own journeys, we must all have one thing in common. In our own way and according to our own giftedness and varying roles, we must witness for our young people that the search for God, the divine, interiority, the spiritual, fullness of life or however we choose to name it, is a search that is worthy of our utmost efforts as human beings. If our young leave our schools without witnessing the power of this search as a priority in the lives of significant adults, we will have sold them short.

Some of you will have the privilege of being able to explore this journey in class, through words and conversations. I hope that you feel confident, empowered and without fear in undertaking this dialogue.

Others will have to rely on the witness and example that they give to these priorities in their own lives as the primary way that they make their contribution to the spiritual future of our young. No less powerful and of utmost importance.

One thing that is certain, no one is exempted! As with all things, our young will learn from you through your actions or through your inaction; your attention to these priorities or your lack of attention.

Our combined task consists in helping our young to discover and develop their innate spirituality; an essentially human trait. Our spirituality leads us to being open to a deeper way of living; discovering and embracing the truth or Divine within each of us. According to Victor Frankl, we live spiritually when the Divine becomes the partner of our most intimate soliloquies. How beautifully expressed!

We can look to Jesus as our inspiration. Jesus is testimony to the 'knowability' of God. Jesus did not simply believe in God; he knew God in an intimate way. As well as being a prophet for justice and compassion, Jesus was recognised as a deeply spiritual teacher. This was the platform for his authority. He modelled the journey we must all make; from belief in God to relationship with God. This is what both challenged and inspired people of his time.

We will not be the face of God in the world without deep relationship with the divine. It is not our belief in God that will change the world. Rather, it is our relationship with God that will transform our lives and the lives of those we encounter.

If our teaching, witness and example inspires the young to embrace this way of living, we can be well pleased. If Catholic education forms the young to prioritise deep relationship with spirit and cast this lens over the challenges that life will present to them, it surely must be authentic and faithful to the Gospel.

Thank you for all that you do to inspire and form our precious young people.

With best wishes,

Dr Wayne Tinsey  
Edmund Rice Education Australia

