



**School Board Chairs Annual Mass 2017
Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA)
Homily**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Friday 19 May, 2017

At a time when Catholic education in Australia is facing many challenges, not the least of which is the challenge faced by the present government's decisions regarding funding of Catholic schools, I wanted to begin my reflections this afternoon by thanking you all for the generosity and commitment you bring to your vital role in your own schools and colleges. Catholic education, while it is of course dependent on just and adequate funding from both state and federal governments, is at least equally dependent on the commitment and generous involvement of parents. The role you play is vitally important in itself, and also in a sense symbolic of the wide variety of ways in which so many parents support the schools which seek to provide the very best education possible for your children - so thank you!

In speaking to you this afternoon here in our beautiful Cathedral, I want to share with you a conviction of mine which I often share with principals, with teachers, and with our local parish communities. A catholic school will not be effective and faithful to its mission if it is not a good, indeed the best school, the best educational institution, it can possibly be. One of your major roles as chairs of local school boards is to work towards this goal: to help make sure that the facilities are as up to date and fit for purpose as they can be; to support the school in providing the most comprehensive curriculum it can; to help ensure that the principal and staff are provided with all they need to deliver the best education possible to your children. What point is there in having a Catholic school system if it does not provide educational excellence? What family would send its children to a second-rate school if they had another option?

It is equally true of course that a Catholic school will not be a good school unless it is Catholic. From that point of view it is both important and significant that we gather each year to celebrate the role of School Boards not just at the Duxton Hotel for a meal but also here in the Cathedral for a Mass. It is a reminder to us that we, the Catholic school community, occupy a unique place in the educational landscape of Western Australia and of Australia more generally. And while it is true to say that we offer a values-based education, and that this is one of those things which makes us so very attractive to so many parents, including those who do not share the Catholic faith, we must say a little more. After all there are many other non-government schools, including Jewish and Muslim schools as well as schools administered by other Christian denominations, which also rightly claim to offer a values-based education. And it is equally true that government schools and especially those who work in them would object, quite rightly, to any suggestion that they are value-free spaces. A quick look at the websites of most government schools would see that they promote many values which we in the Catholic school system would also see as being at the hearty of our efforts.



What makes Catholic schools unique is that they are, or at least should be, grounded in what I would call the Catholic world view. A world-view, or an ethos, is a particular way of understanding how the world works, and especially how human beings are meant to live in relationships with each other, with the world around them, and with God.

In the case of the Catholic world view, which is very obviously a religious world view, we seek to hold together three connected and vital ideas, which in the end are matters of faith. We believe in a God who is the creator and sustainer of all that exists, who holds the world in being, and whose creation of the world was and remains an act of love for humanity, which finds its home in this created world. We further believe that God has entered into our world as one of us in and through Jesus Christ, who comes to us to unveil the mystery of God and help us to understand the depths of God's love and care for humanity, and in doing so set us free from everything that holds us back from being the people God has created us to be. And thirdly we believe that Jesus, through the gift of his Holy Spirit, has called the Church into existence as the place where God is meant to be encountered in all his fullness and where the plans and dreams God has for us are, sometimes spectacularly but more often very slowly and quietly, revealed to us as we make our journey through life.

That there is a God, that God has come among us in Jesus, and that Jesus continues to be present to us in and through the Church – this is at the heart of the Catholic understanding of the world. And it is this conviction which underpins the continued determination of the Church to support Catholic education as strongly and enthusiastically as we can. If our fundamental convictions are right, then it would be unthinkable for us to fail to offer this view of life, this way of life, to our children and young people as a precious gift. Our Catholic schools, not just because they have religion classes but because they are communities which in everything they do seek to live by these convictions, are at the heart of the mission of our Church.

Pope Benedict XVI once said, and Pope Francis has echoed his words, that the role of the Church is never to impose but always to propose the joy of the gospel to each generation and to all societies. Those called to leadership in the educational efforts of the Church in any way, whether it be as clergy, as leaders and teachers in our schools, or as Chairpersons of School Boards, have in the words of this afternoon's gospel, been chosen and commissioned by Christ to bear fruit that will last.

For us that fruit, in the end, will come by working together to ensure that the joy of the gospel, and the peace promised by the Lord to those who build their lives on him, and the serenity and security which comes from taking Jesus at his word when he calls himself the Way, and the Truth and the Life, are offered to our children and young people in a faithful, joy-filled and life-affirming way. None of us can do this on our own but each can play his or her part. It is together, with our eyes fixed on Jesus as our guide and companion, that we can enrich the lives of our children and young people with the joy of the gospel and the peace of the risen Lord.