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| **Student Survey on Religious Education (RE) in Catholic schools**Principal researcher: Professor Graham Rossiter**This project investigates senior students’ views on two questions to help with the development of RE that is relevant to the lives of young people:-****1. The language used for talking about classroom Religious Education.** |

**2. The idea of giving more attention to studying contemporary issues and the search for meaning in a culture that is changing rapidly – at social, globalised and environmental levels.**

**Background to the research questions**

The **language** used for talking about Religious Education is important because it has a shaping influence on understandings of what Religious Education might do best for students in today’s culture. And in turn, this can affect the scope, content and teaching methods.

In times of rapid social change, and even more so during a global pandemic, the presumptions people make about religion and ‘the good life’ can appear shaky and contingent, creating uncertainty and anxiety about the future. Parts of the school curriculum may be able to give **more attention to studying directly the way people try to construct meaning**, **purpose and values for life in a relatively secularised society**. The proposal being looked at here is how Religious Education might adapt to make a useful contribution in this direction in the senior classes, helping resource young people’s capacity for life no matter what their level of religiosity.

In planning the future for Catholic school Religious Education, it will be helpful to have a significant student input on these two questions. The survey is about the classroom curriculum in RE and not about other aspects of the religious life of the school such as liturgy, retreats, voluntary commitment groups, community service etc.

**Participation in the survey**

Tests of the questionnaire suggest that it is may be easier and quicker to do the email survey on this MS word file. When needed, a fully online version will be prepared and available on the Survey Monkey website. To participate, please insert your responses in the appropriate boxes below, save the file and email it as an attachment to Prof Rossiter at g.rossiter@bigpond.com

All the information you provide will be both confidential and anonymous. Your returned questionnaire document will be disconnected from any identifying email address; and all the files will be deleted after data has been entered.

In honouring student contributions to the survey, and in seeing it as important to give young people a significant voice in the future planning of RE, a research report will be made available to participants, as well as to schools where the survey is conducted by diocesan school system authorities. In the latter case, the project will be in accord with the appropriate diocesan ethics protocols. The project analysis will also be reported on the ASMRE website.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. Your views are highly valued.

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**Directions**

I consent to contributing my views on the condition of preserved anonymity and confidentiality.

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| To signify consent, enter **1** in the response box | **Response** |
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**Biographical information**

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| **Questionnaire items** | **Response**  |
| 1. Student year level. Enter **1** for Year 11 Enter **2** for Y 12 Enter **3** for other |  |
| 2. Gender. Type your response in the box |  |
| 3. Catholic diocese of my present school (or country if outside Australia)**Type diocese or country name in the box**  |  |
| 4. Religious identification: **1**. Catholic **2**. Other Christian denomination  **3**. Religion other than Christian **4**. No religion |  |

**Language used for talking about Religious Education**

This section is about the key words and ideas used for describing the purposes and practices of Religious Education. It seeks your views on how meaningful and relevant the various church and educational terms are in proposing an approach to RE (especially in senior classes) that you think would be more appropriate and relevant for today’s students.

*Statement applied to each term*:

**I think that the term** xxx **would be helpful in proposing an approach to Religious Education that is appropriate and relevant for today’s Catholic school students.**

For the following, indicate your agreement/disagreement with the above statement applied to each term separately on a scale of 1-5

1 strongly disagree 2 disagree 3 not sure 4 agree 5 strongly agree

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| **Terms used for talking about Religious Education** | **Responses** |
| **Church (or ecclesiastical) terms**Faith formation |  |
| Catholic identity |  |
| Evangelisation |  |
| Catholic church mission |  |
| Christian witness and sharing personal faith |  |
| Sunday Mass attendance |  |
| **Generic educational terms**Knowledge and understanding of Catholicism |  |
| Some study of other religions represented in Australian society |  |
| Critical thinking about religion |  |
| Study of the contemporary search for meaning |  |
| Skills in interpreting the shaping influence of culture on people |  |
| Study of contemporary spiritual/moral issues |  |
| Resourcing young people’s spirituality whether they are religious or not |  |
| A credible academic subject with the same study demands as regular subjects |  |
| Important as the only spiritual/moral subject in the school curriculum |  |
| Important for the spiritual/moral education of young Australian citizens |  |

**Narratives or scenarios for Religious Education**

As above, for each of the following brief ‘narratives’ or accounts of Religious Education, indicate your level of agreement/disagreement about their **appropriateness and relevance** for today’s students on the scale of 1-5.

1 strongly disagree 2 disagree 3 not sure 4 agree 5 strongly agree

**The narrative** xxx **helps give an account of Religious Education that is appropriate and relevant for today’s Catholic school students.**

The narratives here are not exclusive and may overlap. Judge each just by what it says.

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| **Narrative 1.**The principal purpose of Catholic schools and Religious Education is to participate in the mission of the Catholic Church. Catholic schools are founded on the person of Jesus Christ and are centres of evangelisation. Religious education should imbue young people with a Catholic identity. It should develop their religious faith and deepen their personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ. In RE, students and teachers can share their personal faith. RE should enhance their religious practice and their engagement with the church – especially Sunday Mass. | **Numerical response** |
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| **Narrative 2.**Young people are confronted by the complexities, dilemmas and conflicting interpretations of life’s meaning and purpose. They require, more than ever, the skill of critical thinking in order to navigate an uncertain and pluralistic world. As there is no final answer to life’s ultimate meaning and purpose in which intellectual certainty is possible, human knowledge is always partial and limited. Consequently, students are invited to explore within Religious Education the inexhaustible mystery of human existence, as glimpsed primarily through the lens of the Catholic Christian Tradition, as well as other religious traditions and help render this mystery meaningful in their lives. |  |
| **Narrative 3.**In giving young people access to their religious heritage, Religious Education can enhance their knowledge and understanding of Catholicism. It should also give some attention to other religious traditions represented in Australia. In addition, particularly in the senior classes, it should help develop students’ skills for analysing, interpreting and evaluating contemporary spiritual/moral issues, including scrutiny of the shaping influence that culture can have on people’s thinking and on their values and lifestyle. In times of rapid social and cultural change, and even more so during a global pandemic, the presumptions people make about ‘the good life’ can appear shaky and contingent, creating uncertainty and anxiety about the future. RE is the subject that could give attention to the ways people are trying to find meaning and make sense of life in difficult times. And it can give students the opportunity to engage in some research on these questions. |  |
| **Narrative 4.**The curriculum in any school needs a subject that looks directly at life questions (E.g. religion, ethics, philosophy, personal development etc.) Religious Education, through educating young people in their own religious tradition, as well as some study of religion generally and of the contemporary search for meaning, makes a valuable contribution to the education of young Australians. |  |

**Use of church/ecclesiastical language for religious education (see the ecclesiastical terms listed above).**

Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Not sure 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

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| The church/ecclesiastical language helps give students a better and clearer understanding of religious education and its purposes. | **Response** |
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| Frequent use of ecclesiastical language for RE can make students/parents and teachers think of it more as like a church activity rather than a school/educational one. |  |
| Frequent use of ecclesiastical language for RE can give the impression that it is mainly about recruiting young people to Catholic church parishes. |  |

**Specific church/ecclesiastical terms used for describing Religious Education**

**Faith formation**

Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Not sure 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

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| The meaning of the term, faith formation is clear and not ambiguous. | **Response** |
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| I am comfortable with the view of faith formation as being concerned with changing the personal faith of students. |  |
| Faith formation is a term that teachers may use, but students never hear much about it. |  |

**Catholic identity**

Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Not sure 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

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| The meaning of the term, Catholic identity is clear and not ambiguous. | **Response** |
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| I am comfortable with the idea of RE imbuing students with a Catholic identity. |  |
| The term seems to be ‘inward-looking’ at the Catholic church at the very time when RE needs to be more ‘outwards-oriented’. |  |
| Frequent use of the term would inevitably make students and teachers who were not Catholic feel somewhat uncomfortable. |  |
| Frequent use of the term would inevitably make relatively non-religious Catholic students and teachers feel somewhat uncomfortable. |  |
| The term feels like it is a Catholic slogan – E.g. ‘Make the Catholic church great again’. |  |
| The term gives the impression that RE should be concerned with getting more students back to regular weekly mass attendance. |  |

**The need for giving more curriculum space in RE to studying the search for meaning and the critical evaluation of culture**

A number of items above have already addressed this question.

Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Not sure 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

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| While a good education in Catholicism is important, it would be helpful if there was more scope in the senior classes for the critical evaluation of culture and contemporary questions about religion, meaning and life (as noted in narrative 3 above). | **Response** |
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| Because Catholic school Y11-12 students can already study state ATAR courses like *Studies of Religion* and *Religion and Society*, and Non-ATAR *Religion and ethics*, it is acceptable to have ‘other-than-Catholic’ content in RE programs at this level. |  |
| Having more critical evaluation of culture and contemporary issues in Y11-12 would make RE more relevant to the lives of students. |  |

**Any other comments or reflections that participants would like to contribute to the survey**

Type your response in the box below.

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Many thanks for taking the time to reflect on and answer the questionnaire items.

Your contribution is much appreciated.

Professor Graham Rossiter

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