

## DIOCESE OF PALMERSTON NORTH BOARD OF TRUSTEES CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2013

Good morning everyone,

Naumai Haere Mai,

Tena Koutou Katoa

E nga mana

E nga reo

E nga iwi o te motu

Rau rangarira ma

Tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

Talofa, Malo e lei, Kiorana, Bula Vanaka, Oro, oro, oro

Bishop Charles Drennan,

Tony Murphy, Lynette Roberts-King,

Priests/Trustees/Principals/Staff of our schools/Friends

It is, indeed, an honour to be with you today, since as school trustees, you represent a very significant strength of the Diocese of Palmerston North.

The New Zealand Church is fortunate to have an extensive network of 238 schools enrolling 66,000 students. The schools in this Diocese are a vital part of this network and are fundamental to the mission of our Church, which is to proclaim the Gospel and spread the Good News message of Jesus Christ.

As the world grapples with various conflicts and terrorism of one kind or another, our Catholic Schools have a vital role to play in promoting the importance of the spiritual dimension in our students' lives. Virtues, values, ethics, and spirituality considerations are all taking centre stage as people come to recognise that we all need one another and that we will only make progress by supporting and helping one another, no matter who we are. One of us is never as strong as all of us.

The passage of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act in 1975 was an epoch-making milestone in the history of the New Zealand Catholic Church. It instigated a partnership between the Crown and Proprietors of Catholic schools, which has been enduring and productive. We have had nearly forty years experience of being Integrated State schools and it has been overwhelmingly a happy and productive one.

Over the years since the passage of the Act there have been dramatic changes in the way many Catholic people relate to the Church. The factors that have caused this are numerous, some of which are: the impact of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council; the effects of globalisation; the Maori renaissance; the growth of cultural diversity through immigration; the break-up of the nuclear family; growing religious diversity; the explosion of technology in all its manifestations; the secularisation of society; the values revolution; the persuasive influence of the media in its myriad forms; the expansion of tertiary education opportunities for young people; instant communications and the impact of global trade and finance.

The list could go on and on. The conclusion one is led to, however, is simple. The world today is dramatically different from the pre-Integration world our national school system was accustomed to, where society was more stable and more predictable.

Some people harken back to what they refer to as the good old days of Catholic schooling and fail to recognise that the realities of today's world are just that, realities. Whether we like them or not they are a given that have to be worked with and managed.

The Vatican Council was very clear about the Church's role in the world. "... that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass" (*Gaudium et Spes* 45a).

This is why our Church operates Catholic schools, both in New Zealand and in most countries of the world. It is a broad mandate, which calls for extraordinary creativity from our parish and school communities. We need to be bold enough to accept Pope Francis's statement that the Church is indeed the People of God. What a positively challenging idea this is – since it describes, you and me.

The current unrest in the Middle East is another expression of the realities of post-modern people, and their desire to take charge of their lives. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the time for recognising the sacredness of individuals and their inalienable human rights, which are the dynamos of human behaviour. Seeking to inspire, persuade and encourage individuals, whoever they may be, about the value and authenticity of Catholicism are the only ways available to us in carrying out the Church's role in the world. Nothing else will work – the credibility and integrity of Gospel messengers, however, are paramount.

Seeing the People of God in action engenders believing. Therefore what are we able to do, to spread the Gospel in this complex, yet vibrant, world we inhabit?

Fortunately, our New Zealand schools are doing well by a range of independent public indicators c/f North & South/Metro Magazine. They are committed to, and deliver, special character Catholic education with glittering excellence as its focus. Large numbers of schools are full, with growing numbers of Catholic parents desirous of a Catholic education for their children. The Catholic education brand is respected and well known.

Our major challenge is: how can we do better as we seek to pass on the Faith of our fathers, given the world we live in? Fundamentally, we must first believe this is possible, while creating a vision as to how it might be done. We then need to put strategies in place to make it happen. As St Augustine encouraged, "Trust in God and do everything in your power to make things

happen.” Pope Benedict repeatedly called on Church leaders at various levels in our Catholic community of 1.2 billion people worldwide to use the most modern tools of communication to engage the young and their parents. This is the key to the Church’s future, simply because, these tools are the reality communication medium for vast numbers of people. Pope Francis through his simple engaging persona is showing us another vital way of interacting with others in a happy joyful manner. His guide is the simplicity of St Francis of Assisi. His challenge to us is simple, “have the courage to be happy.” (Rio de Janeiro Youth Congress 2013).

Essentially, a Catholic school community is called upon, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “to be people who live with gratitude for the past, enthusiasm for the present and hope for the future”.

You can see from what I have already shared with you, a Catholic school is not simply another State School with a Catholic bolt-on dimension.

As trustees we need to have a clear understanding of our responsibilities to govern and led a Catholic School. Each school’s Integration Agreement i.e. the legal agreement between the Bishop of Palmerston North and the Government, is very explicit in what it legally expects of trustees of Integrated schools. Could I quickly outline what the document spells out for you as a school’s legally constituted Board of Trustees in what the law calls a Crown Entity?

The Integration Act section 4 provides as follows:

**4. Integrated schools subject to certain enactments**

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), –
  - (a) on integration, an integrated school becomes part of the State system of education in New Zealand; and
  - (b) an integrated school is subject to all the provisions for the time being in force of the Education Act 1964, the School

Trustees Act 1989, the Education Act 1989, and of all regulations made under any of those Acts or under any enactment repealed by any of those Acts; and

(c) an integrated school is subject to all the provisions of the State Sector Act 1988 as if service in the employment of the board of trustees of the school is education service within the meaning of the Act.

(2) Integrated schools enactments (1) shall in all respects be read subject to section 3 (**preservation of special character**) and section 80, and to the other provisions of this Act that relate to integrated schools.

Section 3 and Section 80 of the Private Schools Conditional Education Act are explicit in relation to what an Integrated School is fundamentally about.

(3) Preservation of special character of an integrated school

(1) An integrated school shall on integration continue to have the right to reflect through its teaching and conduct the education with a special character provided by it.

(2) Integration shall not jeopardise the special character of an integrated school.

(3) The Proprietor of an integrated school shall, subject to the provisions of the integration agreement, –

(a) Continue to have the responsibility to supervise the maintenance and preservation of the education with a special character provided by the school:

(b) Continue to have the right to determine from time to time what is necessary to preserve and safeguard the special character of the education provided by the school and described in the integration agreement.

You can see from these very explicit pieces of legislation that a Catholic school at law is a State Integrated School. Therefore, it has to be governed somewhat

differently from your neighbouring State school. It is the role of any trustee to become quickly familiar with what this responsibility means in practice. Our Catholic schools are in fact a significant instrument of the faith of the Catholic community. Fundamentally, it is our Bishops who determine what practically a school's special character looks like.

Your school's Integration Agreement is the pivotal guiding structure which you need to always keep in focus in any decision you make. Not to do so could get you into trouble.

I deliberately sit as a Proprietor's Appointee on four boards of Trustees, so I am able to get a good flavour of what it means to be a trustee – let me assure you it is a wonderful place to be!!!

There are some fundamentals we ought to be thoroughly aware of in our understanding about governing and managing a Catholic School. These essentials were published in a recent edition of *The Tablet* (UK) and authored by Professor James Arthur of the University of Birmingham, June 2013.

According to Vatican II and the education documents that have followed it, there is a Catholic world view that should influence the Catholic school's curriculum. This world view is derived from Catholic teachings, Scripture and tradition. The aim of the Catholic school is to enable students to achieve their complete dignity as persons in a relationship with Christ. According to this view, religion cannot be separated or divorced from the rest of the curriculum, nor can religious education be seen as the *raison d'être* of the Catholic school.

The idea that the school subjects that make up the curriculum are value-free and therefore somehow separate from the Catholic faith is clearly contrary to the Catholic world view. From the Catholic point of view, God is the source of all knowledge and in creating human beings He has endowed them with a desire for knowledge and freedom.

“Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping form Christ in the lives of others” Pope John Paul II.

Simply teaching religious education does not qualify a school as Catholic. The only model of the school that can be adopted, according to Church teaching, is an all-embracing one of faith, and as one English bishop put it: “We do not accept that we can include religious education in any curriculum and then be content that our duties are fulfilled. Nor can we be satisfied with a situation where a teacher is competent in a particular discipline but does not share in an agreed vision of the whole task.”

The central point remains that a school cannot be truly Catholic unless Catholicism and its values are diffused into the entire curriculum, methods, organisation and ethos of the school. If Catholicism is a comprehensive way of life, it seems logical that it should animate every aspect of the school's curriculum. This includes proclaiming the Word of God; celebrating the Sacraments; assisting parents – parishes in preparing young people to receive the Sacraments; embracing disadvantaged kids; and undertaking charitable works.

Each of our 238 New Zealand and Catholic schools ought to be unabashedly Catholic and be thoroughly proud of its Catholic identity and heritage which is referred to above.

A former Secretary of Education once said to me, if Catholic schools are not distinctly different in the education they deliver, why would you continue to have them? He had a point.

Fortunately, the CEO of the Education Review Office whom I meet on a regular basis is often fulsome in his praise for the special character dimension of our schools, along with the quality of the education they deliver. Clearly, we can

never rest on our laurels and always need to be energetic in constantly moving our schools from good to great. This is our sacred heritage.

I recall a conversation I had with the former Prime Minister, Helen Clark, who asked me in the last year of her Prime Ministership, why it was that Catholic schools do so well?. After a pause for thought, I said to her, "Prime Minister, we acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human beings, our faith-religious dimension provides the structure for our educational delivery; we have a clear value-virtues system; we aspire to excellence in all we do, promoting clear expectations of achievement, and we seek to encourage strong community input into the life of each school." She paused a minute or so and said, "I understand all of that." Maybe, one other thing I could have said to the former Prime Minister is that inspiration is today's dynamo that people constantly seek. Students and parents are happy to be persuaded to act in positive ways if their leaders are story tellers; if they are honest and passionate in their behaviours, if they care about people, who share their vision, go beyond expectations, are responsible and show enthusiasm. This is not high flying astrophysics, but simply sound inspirational leadership at work. You and I know the vital importance of leadership that makes things happen.

Catholic schools are not solely in existence to serve the Church's community's requirements. They are places committed to encouraging and enabling their young people to become active citizens who contribute to the common good of society, where a 'fair go' and dignity are part of people's lives. This is fundamental Catholic social teaching which applies between our schools and within our schools.

At the same time, our schools are places where the sacredness of each student and their family are deeply revered, simply because individuals are in fact other Christs. (cf. mother of the young Tunisian vendor whose suicide started the Arab Awakening. The dignity of a fellow human being was violated by humiliation. Dignity is often more important than food.)

People today are crying out for new ideas, particularly those which are inspirational and which touch their lives. As the late Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping once said, "It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, providing it catches mice". Being effective and making things happen is what most people desire.

Education is the locomotive and engine of history. We will not build a civilization of love as Pope John Paul II often spoke about, if we do not believe we can. 'Without A Vision the People Perish', intones this ancient Old Testament injunction - we ignore this advice at our peril. Clearly, we need to establish with one another as Board members, just what we are seeking to achieve as the legal trustees of our school who are charged with managing and controlling the school and ensuring our students achieve to their potential. This can only be done through having a meeting of minds about what our role is, so we come to have a shared vision built on an authentic Catholic education foundation. Professional development, like this experience today, is a great way to learn about our job as trustees of a Catholic school. It is a vital ongoing requirement for all of our teachers and other staff as well. We must be hungry for knowledge and information.

There are numerous resources readily available to you if you need guidance, as inevitably you will. As Cardinal Tom Williams used to say, "the only dumb question is the one you do not ask because you are possibly afraid to do so."

Sources of guidance include the following:

- Lynette Roberts-King and her staff at the Diocesan Office
- The New Zealand Handbook for Boards of Trustees, Principals and Staff of Catholic Integrated Schools. You all will now have a copy of this booklet which is our schools' national operational Handbook – it ought to

become well thumbed. If you prefer an electronic version it is available on the New Zealand Catholic Education Office's (NZCEO) website.

- The Review and Development of the Special Character of a Catholic School is a fundamental guiding resource. This document is also available on the NZCEO website.
- A range of special character guidance documents which have a specialized focus – again available on the Diocesan and NZCEO website.
- The NZCEO Office publishes two documents twice each year, GOOD NEWS AND THE NEWS and AORAKI which focus on examples of good practice from our nation's schools, specifically relating to Special Character operational dimensions. These documents are sent to each school and are also on-line for perusal and study.

In order to operationalize all the good practice that comes to your attention or to seek out better ways of doing things, it is imperative that the Board early in its three year life sets up robust systems and strategies to cover all the aspects that need to be put in place.

Clearly, your principal will provide some guidance for you in all of this. However, it is equally important that each of you contribute your faith, experience and good judgement to the exercise, since that is why you are in the trustee governance role. The strength of the New Zealand education system with each school being a self-managing entity, is that parents, Proprietor Appointees and the professionals work together in order to deliver a high quality education for our young people. People in other countries find it hard to comprehend our way of doing things, since they think good people like yourselves are incapable of doing the job. These people forget what you all do in your day jobs and forget about your experience as parents and what's more, you are not bureaucrats.

In order to run a good school, which is what Canon Law requires each Bishop to ensure happens with each of the schools in his Diocese, a Board of Trustees needs to establish its vision and then create the operational systems necessary to deliver the vision i.e. Charter, Strategic Plan/Annual Plan and all the quality systems which are necessary to run a good Catholic school.

Our New Zealand Bishops are asking us to renew our focus on the Catholic dimension of our schools. Many of our young people see being Catholic as part of their identity. For most, however, this is a cultural connection rather than a commitment. This is not to knock the cultural side of the equation, however, seeking to develop the religious commitment ought to be the goal of our schools. This is despite the sometimes lukewarm approach many families have to their faith. We need to be focused on graduating young people who are committed in their relationship with Christ, this ought to be a significant priority in what we do.

Quoting Cardinal Tom Williams again “excellence is at the heart of the Gospel message, hence nothing short of top quality is ever good enough in a Catholic school.

While I have been concentrating on the special character/religious side of our schools we need to be always laser-focused on delivering a superior quality education. This means trustees have to acquaint themselves with what good benchmark quality education looks like in practice in 2013. Fundamentally, this means knowing something about the Ministry of Education’s Best Evidence Synthesis data and other information that has proven to work in all schools. It means delivering an education which is data-driven where children and young people are guided by their teachers to be engaged in their learning through the use of personalized learning logs, be they of the handwritten or electronic variety (BYOD). It means that principals and staff are familiar with the frequently published Education Review Office documents, which outline what passes for quality education in specific areas of a school’s curriculum. Many

trustees I venture to say hardly know that these superb readable publications exist – see ERO website.

Essentially, what I am saying is an excellent Catholic school is in turn an excellent school. We cannot have one without the other. Effectively, this is the big challenge each of us who are trustees face each time we interact with one another.

How do we put all of this into practice with some practical landing gear?

A Board of Trustees ought to be a powerful structure for shaping and building the culture of its school – after all it is the employer of the principal and all staff, and at law is fundamentally responsible for the operation of the school. If things go wrong, even slightly, it is the Board which is publicly responsible for the consequences.

In my view, Trustees are broadly responsible for creating the culture of the school – in simple terms this means, “The way we do things around here.” It ranges from the vision statement of the school to the delivery of quality of teaching, the belief systems and most importantly, the quality of the relationships between the various players in in the school community and the wider community.

In order to ensure the culture of a school is up to standard, go back to what Prime Minister Helen Clark once said to me, which I shared with you earlier in this address. These fundamentals we have been discussing ought to be kept in mind at every Board meeting when discussions and decisions are made.

Could I suggest some important ways to help grow and develop this school culture:

- The importance of treating everyone on the staff; the students and the wider community with respect since they are in our Catholic theology, “temples of the Holy Spirit”. This applies no matter what circumstances occur.

- The principal of a school is the Board's Chief Executive Officer and is the Board's Chief Advisor. This means maintaining a professional healthy relationship with the principal, but always remembering the buck stops with the Board for every decision that is made. (There are plenty of court cases that attest to this fact).
- The Board sets the educational standards the Principal and staff are expected to maintain and develop. To do this properly it is essential to promote and evolve effective leadership skills in all the staff by ensuring professional leadership courses and opportunities feature strongly in a Board's annual budget. Very clearly, this includes courses put on by the Diocese, the Catholic Tertiary Institute of Aotearoa NZ, Special Character courses and so on. Many of these courses are now delivered electronically. You know, I know, if professionals are not continuously exposed to new ideas and ways of becoming better at what they do they go stale, standards drop and the kids' education suffers. When you stop feeding your mind and soul you go backwards – not good for any school no matter how big or small it is. This wisdom equally applies to trustees.
- From time to time a Board has to engage in a 'Courageous Conversations' with its principal, senior managers and syndicate leaders. Sometimes, boards conduct their business with a degree of apprehension because there happens to be the proverbial elephant in the room. Could I urge you to be brave, yet respectful in raising issues for debate and dialogue, via the correct channels, when quality, standards, integrity and special character issues are at stake. We all acknowledge that nobody ever has the monopoly on enlightenment. However 'group think' can sometimes cloud asking the right and courageous penetrating questions that from time to time need to be verbalized.
- Professional Appraisal of each staff member's performance is a requirement at law. It is so easy for this exercise to simply become a fireside chat, rather than being a catalyst for change and professional development. It is on this occasion when courageous conversations are

often needed, since it is each member of staff who works on our behalf as trustees. The Board Chair is responsible for working with the Board and the Principal to operate this important improvement tool, which in all instances, for every member of Staff ought to have a special character component and an expected outcome.

- Keeping in touch with one's community is vital for any Board of Trustees. This can be done in a variety of face to face ways e.g. Focus Groups and/or the myriad of electronic systems that are now available to us all. The point is we need to listen to our parents/Proprietor/Parish, so the Board and staff are always open to doing things better i.e. a culture of systems improvement.

We have just completed the Year of Faith, yet this has been a catalyst in what is the focus of our schools. Could I quote part of the official Year of Faith Prayer:

*Make us valiant witnesses to the Faith of the Church,  
and inspire us to speak the truth with love. Help us to  
communicate the joy that we have received.*

*Allow us to be united but not closed;*

*humble but not fearful;*

*simple but not naïve; thoughtful but not overbearing;*

*contemporary but not superficial; respectful of others, but boldly your  
disciples.*

*May we bear into the world the hope of God which is Christ the Lord, who rose  
from the dead and lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God  
forever and ever. AMEN*

The Catholic school is primarily an active agent in the evangelising mission of the Church, not just for the students but for all involved in the school – parish faith community. As Pope Francis said recently, “Evangelisation is done on one's knees. Listen well. Without a constant relationship with God, the mission becomes

a job.” In your role as a Trustee of the Board I urge you to keep this mission at the forefront of your decisions. Good governance involves asking the hard questions. Our task is together to make Christ known.

All of what you and I have reflected on thus far this morning may seem very idealistic. However, don't be daunted or put off by high minded idealism. Human history only makes positive progress when somebody believes change can occur and then sets about making it happen: (cf Martin Luther King – “I have a dream.” 10% of the population took on the rest and won) (or c.f. South Africa) I suggest to you that leadership and hope are the two fundamental drivers to bring about change in any human situation.

Leadership is one of the world's most precious resources. Nothing happens without it. Human beings, whether they are younger or older, normally react positively when they are able to see that what is being put before them in any setting will bring about personal and human flourishing. We all react negatively to the same as, same as, approach to life, when often what is needed is the building up of confidence and the encouragement of hope-filled action for a brighter future. This is where good educators come in.

In all communities leadership is well distributed, since everybody possesses a spark or elements of leadership in them, some more than others. Effective leaders are bold and are not afraid to put their values and principles into practice. They are prepared to take risks. At the same time they develop the capacity to think over the horizon in a strategic way, knowing that lofty ideas often generate extraordinary results.

Fundamental to leadership that delivers for those it serves is inspiration and the infusion of hope and enthusiasm into an organisation or structure. Hope is the vital life force dynamo. It is the basis for ongoing change. Business as usual is no longer an attitude that provides life and energy in the twenty first century.

Hope enables people to see that change is possible and that they can engage in the change process. Hope is strong in a group when individuals are supported and affirmed, when openness is apparent and when they feel they are engaged with what is happening. Hope is much more deeply rooted than simple optimism. It normally taps into an individual's faith and spirituality and therefore is much more robust.

Of necessity, we all have to become a champions of hope. This potent force provides the inspiration and energy to enable us to grow and develop in order to make the world a better place.

Trustees are authentic when we try to live by the vision and guidance of the Gospels. We are committed to making the world a better place by giving a hand up to those who need it. Poverty in its various forms is not a destiny and neither is it inevitable.

This is plenty of reason for optimism as we are on a journey of continuous improvement. Tomorrow can be better than today, since as long as we breathe we hope - we breathe in and breathe out our powers and energies for living. May we always be standard bearers of hope as we seek to light a path of hope for those we interact with and seek to inspire.

Thank you for the contribution you make to the development of our school networks, wherever you are from.

Finally, we could gather inspiration from the words of Senator Robert Kennedy: "There are those who look at things the way they are and ask why? I dream of things that never were and ask why not?"

Thank you for your energetic participation in this gathering – it is a significant investment in a bright future.