Part B: Conceptual Underpinnings

This section outlines conceptual underpinnings for Catching Fire as a framework for spiritual formation appropriate to our contemporary setting.

... about Vision

‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’  
(Prov 29: 18)

Vision proclaims what we believe ourselves to be about. It calls us and reminds and brings us back to our centre. In both Greek and Latin, the root meaning of ‘to believe’ is ‘to give one’s heart to.’ So, a vision expresses what a community ‘gives its heart to.’

Catching Fire makes connection with both the archdiocesan vision and the Brisbane Catholic Education vision.

Jesus Communion Mission

- Vibrant evangelising Archdiocese
  
The conceptual foundation for Catching Fire is the archdiocesan Jesus Communion Mission vision (Let Your Light Shine 2004).
  
Jesus Communion Mission is the archdiocesan vision for growing as a vibrant, evangelising Archdiocese, promulgated by Archbishop John Bathersby to conclude Synod 2003. The words Jesus, Communion and Mission represent the vision’s three major actions, calling us to:
  - Embrace the person and vision of JESUS
  - Build COMMUNION with God and others
  - Engage in Jesus’ MISSION in our world.

These three dimensions of living in the light of the Catholic Christian tradition encompass the things worth giving our hearts to – a deep connection to Jesus; a deep relationality in the world that is grounded in the sacred; and a spirit that sends one into the world to be a transforming presence.

The practice of these three dimensions is seen as essential if individuals, communities and institutions in the Archdiocese are to experience the fullness of Christian life and have the transforming impact on the world that is our mission.

Teach Challenge Transform

- Jesus Communion Mission and Catholic Education

Catching Fire also makes explicit connection to our vision statement for Catholic Education – to teach challenge and transform. Catholic education in this Archdiocese is promoted as a lifelong enterprise, inviting all those involved in educational ministry to be anchored in a Catholic vision that is personal and public, reflective and active, nurturing and transformative. Our schools, as part of the evangelising mission of the local church, are well attuned to the power of word and witness in school leadership, staffing and community culture.

The Jesus Communion Mission vision embraced by the Brisbane Catholic Education community in its Vision Statement (Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education, April 2005) is realised through everyday witness, learning and teaching that challenges and transforms the culture and the world in which we live. However, while this vision for Catholic education is mission-focused, formation for those involved, in a myriad of ways, in our educational ministry, must be nurtured from the inside out. The development of a personal connection to the person and vision of Jesus, and the consciousness of, and building of communion with God and others, must be nurtured consistently and deeply so that there will be effective engagement in the transformative mission.
... about Mission

‘The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel. It is also to call the secular world to its own deepest selfhood as a human community. These are not competing goals.’  Paul Lakeland

- From a spirituality of COMMUNION

The mission of the church is evangelisation. Catholic schools draw their purpose for existence from their partnership in this evangelising mission of the wider church. Evangelisation is about transformation. Thus our mission in all that we do in Catholic education as a ministry of the church is about transformation.

The understanding we have of our educational ministry in the church’s mission is vibrant. We provide an education that is underpinned, overlaid and shot through with a view of the world and life that is predicated on a dynamic loving Creator – the original Heart on Fire – who calls all creation to life-giving communion.

Mission in this context is the result and lived out expression of an underpinning spirituality of communion – how can we not respond to people and creation with whom we are connected in the communion of the Trinity in which we all live, move and have our being?

Mission is developed and expressed in ways that include ecclesial, systemic and individual dimensions.

- Ecclesial Dimension: Evangelising mission

In ecclesial terms, the fundamental evangelising mission of the church is about transformation on a personal, communal, local and global level, ‘bringing the good news into all strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new …’ (Paul VI Evangelisation in the Modern World, 1975). The current Church understanding of evangelisation has developed since Vatican II under the strong influence of both Paul VI (1975) and John Paul II.

- Systemic Dimension: The Heart of Catholic Education


Our evangelising purpose is expressed in a dynamic way in our vision statement as an educational mission to TEACH, CHALLENGE and TRANSFORM the world through what we do and how we do it.

This evangelising, educational mission responds to and incorporates the archdiocesan Jesus Communion Mission vision. Catching Fire is about spiritual formation for that mission, and as such, presents all three dimensions of the archdiocesan Jesus Communion Mission vision as integral to the spiritual formation of all within our educational communities and regards all three dimensions as directly relevant to the evangelising mission of Catholic education.

- Individual Dimension: Personal FIRE

For an individual, mission is multilayered, referring to private, personal, vocational, and public commitments that have grown out of a personal spirituality and that carry some ‘fire’ for
them. That fire – the passion which shapes the individual’s spirituality, may be found, articulated and named without reference to the Christian vision just discussed. This pre-evangelisation stage requires recognition and respect, with invitations to connect the individual experience to the Christian meta-narrative. This challenge – holding in balance as it does the deep respect of the individual journey and where God may be found, as well as the corporate beliefs that are foundational to the mission and ministry of Catholic education – is central to the present context of spiritual formation.

... about Evangelisation

‘Evangelisation means nothing less than the total transformation of our world, ourselves included! Archbishop John Bathersby

• Recovering Meaning and Purpose

The word evangelisation is taken from the Latin word evangelium (Greek – evangelion). It translates as ‘good news’ or ‘gospel.’ Catholics believe the church exists in order to evangelise (Paul VI), and the word has regained pre-eminence in describing the mission of the church.

The term ‘evangelisation’ was revived and became embedded in the conversations and outcomes of Vatican II. In the years following, Pope Paul VI re-centred evangelisation as the baptismal responsibility of all Christians (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975) and under Pope John Paul II the idea of ‘a new evangelisation’ gained currency. He saw the need for new ways, new strategies and new commitment in sharing the Gospel, and he saw the Holy Spirit as ‘the principal agent of the “new evangelisation’’. (Tertio Millennio Adveniente 1994, #45) In 2001, Pope John Paul II in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Ecclesia in Oceania reiterated his call for a ‘new evangelisation’ and cited the strengthening of the identity of Catholic schools (#19) as a critical way in which to action this.

Finally, two more terms have come into currency. The term ‘re-evangelisation’ has emerged giving emphasis to the importance of re-newing and maturing faith in our journey as Christians. The term ‘pre-evangelisation’ refers to the stage of spiritual journey where the recognition of the ‘fire’ is identified without connection to the Christian meta narrative, and the emphasis here is on respectful engagement.

Evangelisation is often confused with the term ‘evangelism’. The latter is most commonly used in protestant churches and linked to the narrower practice of proclaiming the gospel with words. Evangelisation, as it has developed in the Catholic Tradition, has a broader and deeper sense. To share the good news and to give witness to it is done in a myriad of ways including direct verbal proclamation but extending beyond it. This embodied understanding of evangelisation is expressed well in the directive attributed to St Francis of Assisi: Preach the gospel always, and when necessary, use words!

Evangelisation then, includes not only the proclamation of the gospel in words, but all of the Church’s ministries and the realisation of its whole mission (cf. GDC, nos. 46-48 passim). This involves the reflection of the gospel in our values and practices, social systems and institutions. It is not just part of what we do, but rather implicit in all we do.
• Deepening Understanding –
Our Archdiocesan Response

In Australia, and in our Archdiocese, evangelisation has become a much more mainstream term in Catholic culture over the last ten years. The publication of the General Directory for Catechesis (1997), and the accompanying adaptation for Australian Catholic Schools provided by the Australian Bishops (authored by Bishop Gerard Holohan) has been helpful in this process. In 2005, the publication of Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, provided a further lens in understanding the mission of the church using key terms (in their original Greek) connected to the church’s earliest times: leitourgia (worship), marturia (witness) kerygma (proclamation), and diakonia (service). Two other functions associated in this way with the Church’s activity are didache (teaching) and koinonia (community). The faces of evangelisation in the work of the church through these ways are as old as the Church herself. The shape and character of each of these is always renewing in the creative wake of the Holy Spirit in our times.

In this Archdiocese, the task of evangelisation and in particular, an understanding of what this call is and how it looks in this culture and for the people of this time and place has been the focus of attention and development at archdiocesan level since 1996. It is predicated on the understanding that God is living and active in the world. God is the first evangeliser.

In our work of evangelisation, God’s work is our model. God has set the pattern. All that we do is a response to God’s passionate heart, the first Heart on Fire. In doing so, our response reflects a fullness of life and our journey toward deep communion with this Creator – through our own growth as a person – and through our combined action to create a transformed world. *(Understanding Evangelisation, 2000)*

Thus, evangelisation is understood as being carried out through word and action and is made visible in personal, social and organisational dimensions. It is an understanding that both reflects our Catholic tradition and challenges us as Catholics looking towards the future.

• Key points

The key points in a current understanding of evangelisation can be summarised as follows:

~ Evangelisation is firstly individual and personal. It is about promoting personal encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ to nurture a deeply personal following of Jesus that is transformative.

~ Evangelisation is communal and corporate. It is about our shared Catholic identity, and involves us all at a communal level. In this, we recognise our collective call through our organisational ministry areas within the church whatever they may be – in catholic education, catholic health, parish life, prison ministries, social outreach.

~ Evangelisation is about transformation on a personal, communal, local and global level. Re-evangelisation (John Paul II) is not so much about ‘bringing them in’ as ‘bringing us out’, re-lighting the fire in ourselves and connecting in a renewed way to our story and ‘the hope we have.’

~ A New Evangelisation calls us to new ways of sharing the gospel in our time and culture.

~ Evangelisation is not just about the ‘words’ but about every way the church continues the ministry and mission of Jesus in the world. These ways include celebrating the sacraments; doing works of justice, peace and compassion; building up community; carrying out our everyday vocation; and being citizens in society.

~ Evangelisation involves deep listening as well as dialogue at a communal level with other traditions and faiths. While Christians must commit to sharing and bearing witness to their own faith, they must also respect the Spirit’s movements throughout humankind and appreciate the many ways in which the Spirit leads to life. This is explicit in Vatican II documents as well as the new General Directory of Catechesis. *(See Thomas Groome pp 4, 5 and Understanding Evangelisation, 2000)*

~ This nurturing of ‘deep listening’ is also fundamental within our personal spiritual journeys and with those to whom we minister.
and alongside whom we work. Whether we are renewing or maturing our own Christian faith (re-evangelisation) or whether we are part of the journey in making the connection between personal ‘fire’ and the ‘sacred fire’ of the Christian story (pre-evangelisation), we are challenged to recognise our own stories and hear each others’ stories into life. None of us has arrived!

• Evangelisation and the School Community

Catholic education fulfills its evangelising mission through the development, support and engagement of its schools. Our witness - as individuals, as school communities, and as an organisation - takes on a broader challenge than attention to the concrete exemplars of proclamation. How we manage behaviours in the classroom and the staffroom; the underlying values with which we design curriculum and develop pedagogy; the underlying vision with which we set goals and undertake school renewal; the approach we have to student wellbeing and the shape of the religious life of the school all give expression to our witness. It is the Catholic school as a whole, in all that it does, and how it does, which brings the good news to those within the school and the broader community. It is the organisation as a whole, through its policies and structures, ways of operating and sense of identity which gives witness to gospel values and the vision of Jesus.

• Place of Staff Formation in Evangelisation

Staff formation for all those engaged in and supporting our school communities is recognised as critical in the effectiveness of our evangelising mission. The Catching Fire Spiritual Formation framework is a strategic response to this important need. It constitutes a key tool for the challenge of new evangelisation as we attend to our individual journeys which in turn give life to organisational identity and witness. It offers a transformational approach from the inside out!

... about Christian Spirituality

The image and likeness of God inside of us is energy, fire, memory, especially the memory of a touch so tender and loving that its goodness and truth become the prism through which we see everything.

Fr Ron Rolheiser

• Spirituality – a way of LIFE

‘Spirituality defines one’s whole way of life. As such, spirituality can be defined as a way of seeing, being and acting. What is distinctive about Christian spirituality is that it is a way of being, seeing and acting that is founded in, and takes its inspiration from, the person and vision of Jesus Christ’ (Let Your Light Shine, p.4). Christian spirituality is about consciously living our lives in relationship with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and following the way of Jesus. Christian spirituality is sustained by personal and communal prayer (Jesus), lived in relationship with a Christian community (Communion) and expressed through working for God’s way of doing things in the world (Mission).

In our Catholic tradition this spirituality is fed by word, by tradition, by the sacraments, by the life and witness of the saints, in Trinitarian theology, a justice imperative and Marian devotion.

• Spirituality of COMMUNION

In the Archdiocese of Brisbane, faithful to the teaching and spirit of Vatican II and recent
papal teaching (At the Beginning of the New Millennium 2001 # 43-45), the core spirituality that all Catholics are called to develop is known by the term ‘spirituality of communion.’ It is a spirituality that ‘has its source in our communion with God, and which is forged in communion with others and with all creation. It is a spirituality of relationships.’

While there are many different ways in which a spirituality of communion can be lived out, it has the following core characteristics:

~ a belief in the Trinity of divine persons as the communion in which we live, move and have our being, and the model for the communion of love the Church is called to become
~ a commitment to liturgy, especially the Eucharist, communal prayer and personal prayer
~ a collaborative spirit
~ an ecumenical commitment
~ an inclusive attitude to the world
~ a readiness to dialogue with other faiths and all people of good will
~ a passion for social justice and human rights
~ a view of the natural environment as God’s creation to be loved and cared for.

(Let Your Light Shine [2004] further developed in Spirituality of Communion and Body of Christ [Archbishop John Bathersby, 2005])

• **Spirituality and CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Christian spirituality in the Catholic tradition is at the very core of what is done each day in the enterprise of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. This is evident in the explicit proclamations of official Church documents on Catholic education, both universal and local, and in the day-to-day discourses of the Brisbane Catholic Education Leadership Team and support personnel and of principals, leadership teams and staff in our Catholic schools and offices all around the Archdiocese.

A spirituality of communion is the spiritual foundation of all teaching and learning in all subject areas insofar as such activity ennobles the human spirit, develops the human capacity to act for the welfare of others and all creation, and contributes to a world that is ‘prayerful, sacramental, just, peaceful, inclusive and reconciling’ (Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education, 2005).

… about **Spiritual Formation**

*Set me like a seal on your heart …for love is strong as death …its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. So 8:6*

• **DYNAMIC process of growth**

Spiritual formation in the Catholic Christian tradition is a dynamic process of growth in the understanding and practice of Christian spirituality. The word ‘formation’ generally refers to a set of experiences designed to prepare a person or group for a particular purpose. It is important to remember that central to our contemporary Christian understanding of formation is the respectful engagement of the experience and wisdom already within. The word ‘formation’, in preference to a word like ‘training’, is most often used in the context of spiritual development and conjures images of a deep learning that involves attitudes, values,
commitment to particular life directions as well as knowledge and skills. In this case, spiritual formation is about all these things in response to Jesus Christ who is seen as the Way the Truth and the Life, and the Holy Spirit acting through the community of Christ’s disciples (Church) in the context of the mission of Catholic education and the Catholic school in particular.

- **LIFELONG partnership with the Spirit**

  Spiritual growth is a lifelong journey. It is also basically an inner journey travelled in a partnership between God’s Spirit and our spirits working in kinship (Groome, p.325). Ultimately, it is the encounters with God’s Spirit that advances spiritual growth. The aim of a spiritual formation programme therefore is to facilitate and nurture that internal encounter with God through communal support and resources provided in a range of ways.

- **CORE expectation within Catholic schooling**

  Spiritual formation of staff in Catholic schools is universally acknowledged as critical to the effective mission of Catholic schools:

  ‘The concrete living out of a vocation as rich and profound as that of the lay Catholic in a school requires an appropriate formation, both on the professional plane and on the religious plane. Most especially, it requires the educator to have a mature spiritual personality, expressed in a profound Christian life.’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, n. 60)

  The effective structuring and resourcing of spiritual formation that both supports this mission and responds to the contemporary contexts of people’s lives is a current and challenging issue for all Catholic education authorities around Australia.

  Spiritual formation is about transformation in the context of lifelong learning and has intentional outcomes relating to the inner journey. While spiritual formation is primarily the responsibility of the individual, both school leadership and Brisbane Catholic Education Centre leadership have key expectation-setting, resourcing and support roles to play.

  Spiritual formation of personnel is understood to be integrally connected to the core business of Catholic schooling and is built on the hope that ‘an adult community whose faith is well formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on to the next generation. Moreover, the witness of adults actively continuing their own formation shows children and youth that growth in faith is lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood.’ (US Bishops Statement: Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, n. 68.)