The past five years in particular have seen a number of developments both within the wider church and the local church which impact on the life of Catholic schools in a variety of ways. At the same time, Commonwealth and State Government initiatives have required a unique response from Catholic education.

**Wider Church**

In the wider church in an ecclesial context, evangelisation has become a catch cry central to the last pope’s pontificate and is being carried forth under the current pontificate. Spiritual formation is a key plank in evangelisation. Evangelisation, defined in the *Queensland Bishops Project* on Catholic Schools for the 21st Century as bringing the love and message of Jesus to people through witness and word is the church’s central mission. Catholic schools draw their purpose for existence from their partnership in this evangelising mission of the wider church. While this relationship is embedded in all Vatican documents, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001) reinforced for these new times, the understanding of the place of Catholic education in the broader mission of the church. It affirmed the Catholic school had an ‘ecclesial identity’ through its role as ‘part of the evangelising mission of the Church’, and it reaffirmed the impact of the witness of teaching staff to the identity and success of Catholic schools.

At the same time, the broad Australian church has witnessed a general decline in church affiliation; a decline in clergy numbers and therefore presence and leadership among Catholic faith communities; a decline in perceived authority and integrity due to the clergy abuse revelations and a decline in adherence to particular church teachings.

For Catholic education the decline in religious vocations has meant the gradual disappearance of religious in schools and the accompanying increase in lay people staffing and leading Catholic schools. The particular style of monastic formation which accompanied the religious lifestyle and thus informed the culture of Catholic schools remains inappropriate to the formation needs of lay people today.

It is a time of transition.

**Local Church**

In this Archdiocese, evangelisation has been a central focus for development since 1996, anchored around the archdiocesan vision: Jesus Communion Mission.

The Archdiocesan Synod, convoked in December 2000 and whose outcomes were promulgated in July 2003, set the pastoral directions for this archdiocese into the new millennium. These directions were encompassed in a new Archdiocesan vision of *Jesus Communion Mission*. 
In July 2004, the document *Let Your Light Shine* was launched, giving shape and articulation of the future directions in the light of Synod Promulgation 2003. This document was designed to serve as a common reference point for all engaged in planning and visioning initiatives within the Brisbane Archdiocese.

The Catholic Education community in this Archdiocese, as well as making a key contribution to the Synod process, has responded to the post Synod developments by revisiting its own key documents and shaping any emerging documents so that they sit clearly in alignment with the new archdiocesan vision and priorities.

**Government Initiatives**

At both national and state levels, the direction of government policy and initiative continues to impact Brisbane Catholic Education in a range of ways. The *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (1999) followed in 2000 by the introduction of the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme* and in February 2005, the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* all directly address the context and culture of education. More recent developments in 2008 include the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals* and the *Queensland Teachers College Professional Development Framework*. These too will have an unfolding impact on our school communities. As such, these initiatives afford Catholic education the challenge and opportunity to re-articulate and re-imagine its place and purpose, its call and contribution.

**The Challenge of Church and State Contexts**

What might have been assumed, given the Catholic demographic attending and staffing schools and the institutional Church model of some 30 years ago, can no longer be assumed. The institutional church simply does not command the authority over followers it once did. Yet it has become increasingly obvious that the school for many (students and adults) has become the primary place to make contact with the Church. This is the new ecclesial reality. At the same time, values based leadership and education is becoming part of the fabric of general Australian culture. The *Leaders Lead Project, the Australian Schools Values Education Framework, the 2005 Balanced Leadership Institutes (ACEL)* and several current AIM initiatives are all illustrative of this current shift.

Within the Church then, Catholic schools have emerged with a religious leadership role that carries more responsibility than ever before. Within the broader Australian culture, personal authenticity in leadership and values-based education has been embraced. There is a general shift giving a heightened profile to values and personal character in leadership and education. So for Catholic education, the stuff of faith, spirituality, mission and vocation must now be defined, articulated, modelled and explored in ways we have not done before. This has been an emergent challenge, becoming a more urgent issue.

*‘Come Holy Spirit… rest in me that I may be tranquil and still. Speak to me things hidden and longed for so your light may shine through me.’\*  
Julian of Norwich

**Catholic Education – Response Markers to the Wider Contexts**

Catholic education authorities at national, state and archdiocesan levels have been attentive to the centrality of the mission dimension of schools and the emergent needs of the faith dimension of school personnel to support the mission dimension for some time.
**National Catholic Commission Markers**

At the national level, the National Catholic Education Commission’s 1991 *Statement of National Curriculum* firmly placed the vision of the human person in the Christian tradition and faith development in the Catholic tradition as the foundational platform for Catholic education.

A subsequent policy document *Catholic Schools: Why We Have Them: What They Aim to Achieve* (1998) addresses explicitly the distinctive goals and features which derive from a core of philosophical and theological truths which are central to the character and mission of Catholic education.

Further to this, *The Top Ten Challenges of Catholic Education* identified in 1996 a particular need, among other things, to provide better quality programs for the professional development of religious educators and for the faith development of all teachers.

**Queensland Catholic Education Commission Markers**

*The Queensland Bishops Project: Catholic Schools for the 21st Century* in 2001 posed the question: What are to be the defining features of Catholic schools within the context of the Church’s evolving mission in the world? Each of the Queensland dioceses undertook a process of developing their own profile in response to this research.

The QCEC in its revised policy on school renewal in 2003 addressed and incorporated the outcomes of the Bishops Project. It also identified the Catholic school as a faith community and reaffirmed the school as ‘an integral part of the evangelising mission of the church.’ (*Catholic School Renewal in Queensland*)

In its 2000 policy statement on senior leadership positions, the centrality of the religious dimension of Catholic leadership is acknowledged and the inclusion of ongoing formation in the religious dimension of leadership is named as a principle on which the policy is based. Those aspiring to senior leadership positions in Queensland Catholic schools will show ‘a demonstrated commitment to ongoing religious formation’. However, the responsibility for the implementation of ‘ongoing formation’ remains with individual employing authorities.

Reflecting and responding to a growing national concern about the lack of people aspiring to school leadership positions in Catholic schools, the QCEC initiated ‘The Succession Project’, commissioning a number of research projects under that banner to investigate specific issues around leadership and succession. Spiritual and faith formation was the focus of one of these research projects and was completed in January 2005. The findings identified a general dissonance between the assumed priority and need for spiritual and faith formation for leaders in Catholic schools in Queensland and the support for this area. This report indicated that while some commendable things were happening, a more intentional and systematic approach was required to respond more effectively to the needs and responsibilities of spiritual formation in Queensland dioceses.

**Brisbane Catholic Education Markers**

Within a demanding ecclesial and educational environment, Brisbane Catholic Education has continued the development of policy and perspective that owns and reflects an understanding of Catholic education as vocational, missional and transformational.

There are NINE markers relevant to the contextual discussion here.

- Brisbane Catholic Education Statement of Principles for Employment in a Catholic school
- Defining Features of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane (2001)
• Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education (2005)
• Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report (2005)
  Archdiocese of Brisbane
• Brisbane Catholic Education Leadership Framework (2006)
• Guidelines for the Religious Life of the School (2008)

Brisbane Catholic Education Statement of Principles for Employment in a Catholic school concerns our expectations about standards as they apply to the professional and witness responsibilities of any staff member. These principles derive from a reflection on Church documents relating to the work of Catholic education. This statement aligns with the documents highlighting professionalism, witness and mission as key principles of employment.

The Defining Features of the Catholic Schools of the Future in the Archdiocese of Brisbane was developed after broad consultation in response to the Queensland Catholic Bishops Research Project. This report was approved in 2001. In reviewing the wording of the defining features in the context of the Archdiocesan Vision of Jesus Communion Mission, the Archbishop wanted to stress the significance of the life and mission of Jesus Christ as foundational for our Catholic schools and has elaborated the first defining feature accordingly that:

The Catholic school of the future in the Archdiocese of Brisbane will promote the dynamic vision of God’s love manifest in the life and mission of Jesus Christ.

Again, key features of the full document include recognising and nurturing the spirituality of each person and providing an authentic experience of Catholic Christian community.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Learning Framework, developed in 2002, identifies the overarching goal for learning as the empowerment of learners of all ages to shape and enrich our changing world by living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The educational mission of Catholic Christian schools is focussed on giving witness to the gospel and the integration of faith, life and culture. The framework builds on the premise of the uniqueness of every human being in understanding each human being as a life-long learner.

Celebration and Challenge was first released in 1998 and revised in 2004. This document articulates six dimensions of the role of a teacher in a Catholic school. Key elements of these dimensions include Vocation, Community and Witness. This document provides an important and useful framework for teachers to reflect on their work personally and professionally.

The April 2005 launch of the Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane makes explicit an holistic approach to lifelong learning in Catholic education which
is personally and communally faith centred, and which is intentionally transformative. The statement embraces the new archdiocesan vision of Jesus Communion Mission, modelling a collaborative perspective to which it calls each individual Catholic educational community.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report (2005) was commissioned by the Catholic Education Council and conducted by the Flagship for Creative & Authentic Leadership at ACU National. It constituted a comprehensive review of service and direction. The findings were very affirming of the service provision of the centre, and nine recommendations were made. Importantly, the first of these was to focus specifically on the area of spiritual formation and evangelisation. Catching Fire is a central component in the strategic re-sourcing of this area.

The Strategic Renewal Framework for Catholic Schooling 2007 – 2011, launched in October 2006 is responsive to the new archdiocesan vision of Jesus Communion Mission; the new Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education; and the Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report recommendations. A key development from the previous Strategic Renewal Framework (2002 – 2006) has been to situate the religious and evangelising mission of schools as Priority One, and to give particular focus to the place of spiritual formation for staff within this. Intentions and expectations include providing ongoing formation opportunities in spirituality for mission and theology .. for staff (I 3) and ensuring programmes are in place to support ongoing formation in spirituality for mission … informed by the Spiritual Formation Framework. (E 2)

While the specific reference to the spiritual formation of leaders articulated in the previous Strategic Renewal Framework document (2002 – 2006) has been removed, the new Strategic Renewal Framework document (2007 – 2011) highlights a planned approach to developing leadership (Pr 4: E 4). The new direction in the integration of spiritual formation into leadership development and professional learning will be reflected in this planning.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Leadership Framework was launched with the Catching Fire Formation Framework and the Strategic Renewal Framework in October 2006, highlighting the link between these three key frameworks.

The Brisbane Catholic Education Leadership Framework is elaborated out of the Leadership Framework designed as one of the research projects commissioned by the QCEC. The Framework was developed further by Brisbane Catholic Education. The scaffolding of the religious dimension of this framework is in harmony with the underlying assumptions and understandings of spiritual formation and leadership articulated in the Spiritual Formation Framework. There is also a strong alignment between spiritual formation and the Leadership Framework Capabilities. It is spiritual formation which is foundational to the development of all the capabilities in the Leadership Framework. In other words, spiritual formation is pivotal to the vital functioning and real outcomes for leadership across all core and supporting dimensions.

The Guidelines for the Religious Life of the School, launched in September 2008, provides a mapping of the areas of religious focus within the school community outside of the classroom. With the key components aligned with the Strategic Renewal Framework, the guidelines provide a useful support to schools for planning and goal setting in this area. Together with the Religious Education guidelines, they also provide a mapping of the areas of responsibility in religious leadership.

**Key Questions Informing the Framework**

The nine markers outlined above, highlight our beliefs and values, frameworks, planning principles and priorities, and expected outcomes for the mission and purpose of Catholic education and all those involved in this enterprise.
Catching Fire, our Spiritual Formation Framework, supports and amplifies these clearly expressed signposts.

In revisiting these markers – signposts that proclaim who we are and what we are about as people involved in the mission and purpose of Catholic schooling in the Archdiocese of Brisbane – a number of spiritual formation questions emerge that help focus our attention:

Questions about Embracing Jesus:
- How do we support people to ‘give witness to the gospel’? (BCE Learning Framework 2002)
- How do we nurture the spirituality of each person? (Defining Features of Catholic Schools 2001)
- How do we ‘support the ongoing formation in spirituality for mission’ for all our staff? (Strategic Renewal Framework 2007 - 2011)

Questions about Building Communion:
- How do we develop a capacity to witness and build community? (Celebration and Challenge 2004)
- How do we provide an authentic experience of Catholic Christian community? (Defining Features of Catholic Schools 2001)
- How do we integrate faith, life and culture? (BCE Learning Framework 2002)

Questions about Engaging in Mission:
- How do we understand ‘the religious and evangelising mission of schools’? (Strategic Renewal Framework 2007 - 2011)
- How do we ‘promote a dynamic vision of God’s love’? (Defining Features of Catholic Schools 2001)
- How do we understand our role in Catholic education as ‘transformative’? (Archdiocesan Vision Statement for Catholic Education 2005)
- How do we promote teaching in Catholic schools as a vocation? (Celebration and Challenge 2004)
- How do we ‘achieve a recognition that evangelisation is the responsibility of everyone in Brisbane Catholic Education’? (Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report (2005)

Questions about Strategic Approach:
- How do we ensure ‘a planned approach to developing leadership is evident’? (Strategic Renewal Framework 2007 - 2011)
- What is the function of spiritual formation within the roles and domains of school personnel? (Spiritual and Faith Formation QCEC Project 2005)
- How do we ‘develop effective supporting structures and processes for evangelisation’? (Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report (2005)
- How do we facilitate the embedding of evangelisation within our ministry of Catholic Education including the faith formation of all staff with particular emphasis on those in leadership positions?’ (Brisbane Catholic Education Centre Renewal Report (2005)

Flagging a Shift in Perspective

In responding to these questions, Catching Fire heralds a shift in thinking about the place and process of spiritual formation in the people and structure that is our educational community. This is evident in two main ways:

1. It represents a shift from a silo model to an integrating model. This is not a framework that sits outside or as a separate silo next to other frameworks/initiatives. Rather, it seeks to embed the spiritual formation of all involved in Catholic education within the frameworks, processes and domains that already exist, or may develop.
2. It requires a shift from a ‘function’ modality perception of spiritual formation to a ‘core’ modality perception. Spiritual formation has to do with the growth of a person from the inside out. It is not an added function or domain itself, nor is it time out from the range of functions or domains within which one must operate. Rather, spiritual formation permeates and shapes the way in which every function or domain is fulfilled. It certainly involves a knowledge base and skilling, but these are facilitators of the real work which is about developing a spiritual core that has a direct bearing on how one leads, teaches, supports, interacts, plans and manages.

Concluding Comments - Into the future

It has become a more and more commonly held view that Catholic schools are for many Catholics and people of other faiths and traditions the place for a more intense encounter with the gospel message and the lived community of the Catholic tradition. (Seamus O’Grady 2005)

Spiritual Formation in a Catholic Educational Setting

Spiritual formation is understood here as both an integrating reality and a dynamic process. It is not a separate component of a skill base, role description or professional domain. More than any other kind of formation or professional learning, spiritual formation deals with the lodestone of a person’s being. In this sense, we are about developing people so in touch with their own soul and with God that they make a difference in every context of their lives. Spiritual formation is about facilitating the growth of the Spirit in individuals in a way that radiates in every aspect of their vocation.

Historically, within the wider church and within schools, the work of spiritual formation along with faith witness and leadership resided with religious and clergy. While Vatican II established the baptismal call and right for lay people to develop, witness and proclaim the gospel vision, in reality lay people were perceived as having a secondary role in all areas of spirituality and faith.

Times have changed and school staff demographics have radically changed. However, as the religious and clergy numbers in schools have diminished and lay people have taken up the teaching and leading roles previously held by religious and clergy, the mentality that the spiritual and faith role is ‘other’ has not altered. We are at a time now where a paradigm shift in this thinking is required.

In our policies and vision, the foundational and permeating nature of a transforming mission based on the life and Gospel message of Jesus is absolutely clear. Spiritual formation in any Catholic community is that which colours and shapes every function that every roleholder performs. For us in particular, it infuses all of the activity – goals, processes and outcomes of Catholic education.

Because spiritual formation is about being, spiritual formation will determine very much how one teaches … or leads …. or deals with parents …. or engages with staff …. or tends to children ….. or gives professional support … or relates to students. It is a powerful and fundamental fuel for the mission of Catholic education.

Catholic educational communities are about nurturing ordinary people with an extraordinary vision that speaks of the heart of God. Every good teacher in every good Australian school nurtures the education of each child. But the teacher in a Catholic school is about nurturing the education of each child with the eye of one who sees God’s imprint and God’s love in the face of each child, and responds with a sense of presence and patient awareness that God’s work is done, yet never finished, in these encounters.

Every good leader in every good Australian school displays competencies across a range of dimensions, including community building, curriculum management and vision keeping. However, the leader in a Catholic school manages and leads the school community with the eye of one whose vision is larger than the dimensions she/he manages and who knows the witness of
this vision which permeates his/her approach to all planning and people. Leading and learning can only be grown and sustained in a rich and real spiritual life.

Every good school secretary in every good Australian school is the competent welcoming face of the school and is a caring reference point for staff, students and parents in the school community. The school secretary in a Catholic school though, manages this role with the eye of one who knows ‘Christ has no hands but hers’, and who is mindful of the heightened importance of all the small exchanges in the day that no one else but the heart of God will witness.

This is the transforming vision called to be lived out in Catholic communities every day.

In this diocese, there is a sound and collaborative relationship among archdiocesan vicariates, with a proactive and integrated approach to addressing contemporary realities with a living understanding of mission and evangelisation. In this respect, the local church context is conducive to an equally contemporary initiative to address the needs for mission formation in school communities.

In addition to this, the Australian, Queensland, and Brisbane Catholic Education Markers outlined above clearly define what it is that Catholic schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese are about, how they are to be identified, and what priorities they will have into the future.

This framework is about supporting the development of all people involved in Brisbane Catholic Education to realise that vision and mission, so that words like ‘gospel witness’, ‘faith community’, ‘vocation’, ‘evangelising mission’, ‘transformation’ and ‘Jesus’ vision’ are words that no longer need explanation or unpacking, but rather become secondary descriptors of a strong and personally owned positive experience of seeing and living in the world through a Christian Catholic lens. Mission and Vision only ever becomes real and powerful, when enfleshed, moment by moment, in the daily lives of each and every person. The success of this meaning making rises and falls on the lived out action of a lived in faith, shown in each encounter in and out of the classroom, the office, the assembly hall and the sporting field. Mission lived out in this way happens through attending to and growing in the spiritual journey. Those who do this not only help the spark to catch; they are in fact, the most potent agent of evangelisation the Church will have.

The degree to which Catholic educators take seriously the challenge to translate the vision and mission statements into everyday practice, to be intentional about witness and word, to explore personal meaning making in the light of the gospel, will be the measure of the effectiveness of Catholic education as an agent of transformative mission in the Church.