

Catholic Schools' Convention 2006

Bishop Peter J Cullinane DD

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Opening Address

+ P J Cullinane

Whaikororia ki te Atua i runga rawa, te kaihanganga i te rangi me te whenua.

E te whanau o te whakapono, e nga iwi katoa, tena koutou , tena koutou, tena koutou.

Distinguished guests, parents, students, schools' staff, proprietors, boards of trustees, administrators and all stake-holders of Catholic education, this Conference is about you and what we can achieve together.

It's about what we can do for our nation by being faithful to our Catholic identity. Catholic education would not be Catholic if it were merely self-serving. Instead, it equips us to reach out into all aspects of society, helping to make "human life more human" (John Paul II). In that way, we honour the God who made us to be fully human and fully alive. And we contribute to that agenda by being people formed after the mind and heart of Christ.

Naturally, we see the work of education as a responsibility, and one that we take very seriously. After all, it is about people: he tangata, he tangata, he tangata. But that is also the reason why it is more than a responsibility: it is a huge *privilege*. To contribute to the formation of a child, it's well-being, future and life choices, is a sacred task. We are on holy ground.

Last year was the 30th anniversary of the Private Schools' Conditional Integration Act (PSCIA) which brought about a new partnership between our schools and the State schools, and new forms of collaboration with the Ministry of Education and successive governments. We remember with gratitude all those who pioneered those developments 31 years ago:

Te hunga mate ki te hunga mate, tatou te hunga kite te hunga ora e tau nei.

What the pioneers of Integration did ensure and enshrine our ability to make a distinctive contribution to education in Aotearoa-New Zealand. That is a bold claim, so let me explain:

However much the secular clause of the Education Act might be necessary in a pluralist society (and it is), the advantage of *not being constrained by that clause* goes right to the heart of education as we understand it – because it leaves us with the freedom to give our children the best of all reasons for believing in themselves – which is essential to the education process. We can assure them that the reason why they matter, and why they matter whatever happens to them, is because they matter to God. And we are free to explain that God's love for them has been revealed in the person, life, death and resurrection of Christ. In what he did for us, we find the greatest possible reason for affirming the dignity of every person and the sacredness of every life.

Short of being able to give those assurances, we could only give them the know-how of successful living. Obviously, that is important too, and we are committed to pursuing it with excellence. But when we can give our children a reason for believing in themselves based on how much God believes in them, then we are giving them a huge incentive for learning the know-how of successful living.

“Education” helps them to discover *how* to live; “Catholic” helps them to know *why* it really is worthwhile: life itself is, and therefore so is everything that enhances it. Bringing the how and the why together is Catholic education’s distinctive contribution to education in New Zealand; an education that radiates hope.

The faith on which this hope is based is not just some kind of spirituality that individuals can have without reference to anyone else. Instead, it is a faith that has been historically revealed and is passed on. We receive it by actively inhabiting communities in which that faith is lived. That is why Catholic education is a seamless garment, uniting home, school and parish.

The challenge for the future is for our homes, schools and parishes to radiate hope in a world that increasingly lives in fear of the future. The hope entrusted to us is that which Christ’s disciples experienced on the day of his resurrection. That experience didn’t leave a lot of room for fear. If he is for each of us personally, as he was for them, someone whose company we enjoy, whom we love dearly, whom we would trust with our life, and to whom we are forever grateful, then we shall be credible bearers of the transforming hope they experienced. This is critical and decisive to the vocations of parents, teachers and pastors. Any weakness along the seamless garment of home, school and parish endangers the whole fabric. And if the salt should lose its flavour, with what shall we make a *distinctive* contribution?

Just before I declare this convention open, I have one other pleasant duty: “Tu Kahikatea” is our newly developed framework for Catholic Ministry with Young People in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It is for the use of parents, teachers, pastors, youth ministers and pastoral leaders. Tu Kahikatea, or white pine, stands straight and tall – this is our hope and vision for our young. On behalf of the bishops, I thank the National Council for Young Catholics for putting it together, and in the name of the bishops I now present it to the Church in our country to be part of the seamless garment.

Finally, on behalf of the bishops, I thank Brother Pat Lynch and all his team, and I thank all of you for your day-by-day dedicated service to a great cause.

Hapaitia te ingoa o Hehu Karaiti,
He ringa miti tai heke
mo te waka o te Hahi Katorika
me te ao katoa.

I declare the Convention open.