

# Catholic Schools Convention 2009

Bishop Peter J Cullinane DD

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## Catholic Schools Convention 2009 Address of Welcome

+ P J Cullinane

E nga mana, e nga reo, e te hunga whakapono, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

On behalf of the bishops I welcome you to the 2009 Catholic Schools Convention. These events continue to be held every 3 years because staff and administrators of our schools have shown how much they appreciate this time together.

On behalf of all, I thank Brother Pat Lynch and his team for the planning and organising of this event.

Most of all, on behalf of the bishops, I thank all of you who work at the coalface of Catholic education day by day, week by week. You contribute hugely to the formation and well-being of children and young people, and through them to the formation and well-being of our nation.

Historically speaking, great personal sacrifices, especially by parents and Religious Orders, made up the very fabric of the school system we have inherited. We need to know, though, that personal sacrifice will continue to be integral to Catholic education for as long as it is called Catholic. Not even Integration has changed the need for that.

It is said that crisis brings out the best and the worst in us. We are in something of a crisis situation now: a short-fall in the monetary resources needed to bring our schools up to par, and a shortage of people with the qualities and passion to do justice to tagged positions, can impact negatively on morale, on performance, and on rolls. The question is: will this situation bring out the best in us or the worst? It comes down to how deep is our commitment to the common good. To illustrate what I mean, I put before you the image of concentric circles.

In the inner-most circle, I invite you to see your own particular school. Confronted by needs that sometimes make us feel desperate, we could do our worst by not looking further than the needs of our own school. We could do our best by recognising that each school belongs to a **network of Catholic schools**, and that only by looking after the network can we effectively look after each school. Imagine what would happen to our secondary colleges, for example, if we could not sustain our primary schools; or to some of our smaller primary schools if they didn't cluster us for administrative purposes? The point is: no school can be an island in a sea of rising pressures.

In the next concentric circle we notice how our network of Catholic schools is located within the still wider network of our partnership with other State schools and the Ministry of Education. We would do our worst by focusing narrowly on our own interests, playing no active part in the wider circles of education. It was gratifying to see that the newly elected Executive of the Secondary Principals' Association includes three secondary principals from Catholic colleges. Their involvement shows a truly Catholic sense of the common good.

In the next circle we see the whole education sector within the wider community of New Zealand society. Schools could do their worst by buying into an education that merely forms

people in the likeness of society as it is, instead of giving them the critical skills, the vision and the passion to make society less greedy than it is, and more deeply respectful of human life and human rights across the spectrum. Education is essentially about the development of whole persons: intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, morally and spiritually. We are in a privileged position to provide holistic education. It was from this perspective that the Catholic bishops made a submission on the Draft Curriculum (2006). The focal points of that submission are still valid, and copies of it can be picked up at the back of the hall.

In similar vein, it was gratifying to note the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the NZ Catholic Education Office and Caritas Aotearoa-NZ, committing themselves to “working in partnership on strengthening Catholic education and in particular in the areas of justice, peace and development education.”

The Catholic character of our schools is not limited to the environment of the school, but looks for expression in what our schools stand for through an ever outward-looking commitment to the common good. That is dynamic of the Gospel and the values of Jesus Christ. We are *at* our best when we *give* of our best.

May our time together at this convention be an experience of what happens for each when our concern is for all. Thank you.

Ma to rourou, ma taku rourou, ka ora te iwi.

Ka ora koutou, ka ora te iwi.