

Annual Conference
Tasmanian Catholic Parents and Friends Federation
Smithton, 12 April 2008

Mr Bill Button, Chairman of the State Council of the Tasmanian
Catholic Schools Parents and Friends Federation

Mr David Bartlett, Deputy Premier, and the Minister for Education
And other invited Members of Parliament

Mr Anthony Morgan, Acting Director of Catholic Education

Mr Rod Scurrah, Chairman of the Tasmanian Catholic Education
Commission

Priests and Religious
Principals of our Catholic Schools
Delegates to this Annual Conference of the Federation

On 6 February this year, Ash Wednesday as it happened, I celebrated the tenth anniversary of my ordination as a Bishop. On 26 July this year, I will celebrate the 9th anniversary of my assuming the role of Archbishop of Hobart after succeeding the late Archbishop D'Arcy.

On eight previous occasions now, I have accepted the invitation to attend the opening session of the Conference, and in most instances I have been present for the whole of the first day. I am very happy to be able to spend all of today with you as the guests of St. Peter Chanel School here at Smithton. I look forward to the celebration of the Conference Mass this evening, and attending the Conference Dinner, before moving down to Rosebery for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of St. Joseph's School tomorrow morning.

In last nine years, I have attended conferences at Deloraine, Cygnet, Latrobe, Riverside, Austin's Ferry, Rosebery, Mornington and now it is the turn of St. Peter Chanel, Smithton to be our hosts.

In addition to covering a considerable part of the state, I was more interested to take a look at the themes of my addresses in past years. It is evident that in some instances there were pressing issues at the particular time. Then there are some issues that do not stay much below the surface. Finally, there are some issues which I have chosen to highlight at a particular point, referring to them on a number of occasions in sequence.

What occurs to me that I have become somewhat more focussed in recent years on the issues around the Catholic character of our Catholic Schools. Since 2004, I have been on this theme, and I am very reassured by my observation that this is being taken seriously.

At this point last year, I had given conditional approval to the establishment of a new secondary college at Kingston. Some weeks later, on 29 May 2007, I gave my formal approval for the project, but I did confirm some of the stipulations which I had earlier flagged.

In the Charter for St. Aloysius Catholic College, there is a provision that a target of 75% Catholic student enrolment would be taken up right from the very beginning. That still leaves a considerable number of places for students whose parents wish to enrol them at the new College, even though they are not baptised in the Catholic Faith. Many students, and their families from this particular cohort have made a significant contribution to our Catholic schools and I am confident that the situation will continue into the future.

Work is now complete for a Charter for all Catholic schools along the same lines, so that the policy which was implemented as a pilot approach, will eventually become the norm in all other Colleges and Schools as well. I am not unaware of the challenges that this may present, particularly in some of the smaller primary schools. But I believe that there is what I call a “critical mass” which needs to be present to ensure that the Catholic ethos, and the Catholic identity can be expressed and maintained.

Eventually all schools will be asked to adopt the charter, and they will subsequently receive a mandate from me to operate as a Catholic school

To proceed down this track is, as I mentioned last year, is to act in contravention of the 1998 Anti-Discrimination Legislation which is the current law. Negotiations are continuing to ensure that the legislation in this state is in harmony with that of all the mainland jurisdictions.

Through the course of the nine years, I have made comments about funding arrangements, and special assistance that is provided by both the Federal and State Governments. Discussions around these issues still take place, and I have noted some of the matters of concern which the President has raised in his address.

In just two months from now, 350 young Tasmanians, many of them senior students in our Catholic Colleges, will be travelling to Sydney to participate in the week-long program which culminates on Sunday 20 July, World Youth Day. Pope Benedict XVI will be making the long journey from Rome for the occasion, a not inconsiderable effort on the part of a man of 80 years of age.

I am very grateful for the support that has been given to our young people from parishes, colleges and the wider community. It may be only a relatively short journey this time, to Sydney, but it will still be a journey of a lifetime for everyone who attends, myself included.

In his letter to promote World Youth Day 2008, Pope Benedict refers to the particular role of young people in the task of evangelisation at the present time. As some of you would know, the theme for World Youth Day 2008, comes from The Acts of the Apostles, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses*"¹

¹ Acts 1, 8.

In his Message for World Youth Day 2008, Pope Benedict clearly indicates that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been given much more widely again, and not only to those of early Christian times. He of course hopes that the young people in particular, will absorb this message as they prepare for World Youth Day and as they reflect on the particular theme that the Holy Spirit has been given to them, and that they too will be the witnesses of the Holy Spirit.

However, it is a message and reminder for us all, that the Holy Spirit has been given to each one of us, and that each of us are called to be witnesses as well. In answer to the question, “*How can we allow ourselves to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and to grow in our spiritual lives?*” Pope Benedict says very clearly that we can do so by means of the Sacraments, particularly those of Christian initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist which he says are complementary and inseparable.²

In my examination of the themes of my address at previous Conferences, I have mentioned the change in policy, and the implementation of that policy with regard to the order of the three Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, and the wider roles of responsibility in the preparation of the candidates, to be shared by parents, parishes and schools.

Further on in his letter, Pope Benedict states that there is a need for young people who will allow God’s love to burn within them and who will respond generously to his urgent call, just as many young Blessed and Saints did in the past, and also in more recent times.

The Holy Father is convinced that the spirit of Jesus is inviting young people to be bearers of the Good News of Jesus to their contemporaries. Young people are more aware of the ideals, the language, and also the wounds, the expectations and at the same time the desire for goodness, felt by their contemporaries.³

² WYD Message, par 6

³ WYD Message, par 7

I have noted the theme of this conference - "*Awaken the Giant within.*" The particular focus of your conference is the role/responsibility that parents have as the first educators of your children. In fulfilling this responsibility, it is important that there be honest and meaningful partnerships established between parents, schools, the overall Catholic community and indeed the wider community as well. The reality is that no one group can achieve the overall objective of providing a comprehensive education, with a Christian emphasis, without the involvement of people at many different levels.

In the changes that have taken place with regard to the Sacramental Program, I believe that the proper relationships between parents, parishes and schools are being respected and encouraged. There is always much to do, and we cannot slacken our efforts for a moment.

I am particularly grateful to the members of the Federation of Parents and Friends in Catholic Schools for your readiness to become heavily involved in the education of your children and the support of the schools and colleges they attend. By being members of school or college boards, there is an even further contribution that many parents make. We are always in need of additional involvement at that level.

This year I have been invited to officially open this 49th Conference, which I now formally do. I hope that it will be a very productive gathering, and a strong preparation for the 50th anniversary which is already being planned for next year.