



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education.

Care, concern, and challenge for Catholic Education

25 January 2009

To the Catholic Community, Catholic Schools, Educators, Learners, Supporter and Beneficiaries of Catholic Education.

We, the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa, want to express our deep appreciation for the work people are doing in Catholic schools. As Bishops we give our unequivocal commitment to Catholic schools that are gospel-based, centred on Christ, and which strive to be communities of care, selflessness and sharing.

Schooling has been, and remains, an important part of the mission of the Church. Our schools strive to help everyone, rich and poor, to grow in faith and to integrate faith with experience. Inspired by the gospel, Catholic schools respect the freedom and dignity of every human being and develop the qualities of personal integrity, moral courage and social responsibility that are marks of authentic Christian personality.

Religious Education programmes in Catholic schools set them apart from other schools. Our programmes are based on the gospel and on sound educational principles. We need to ensure that prayer and liturgy remain central in the life of our schools.

Teachers in Catholic schools are called by God to participate in the teaching ministry of Jesus. Their vocation involves vision, conscientious work, professionalism and care for the children entrusted to them. Teachers in our schools witness to the mission of Christ in bringing about a society based on the principles of love, peace, truth and justice. More than this, teachers are called to prepare their learners to be active and responsible members of society who have purpose and meaning in life and who are capable of being agents of social change.

In the past, we have depended on religious congregations and overseas sources to finance our schools. This is no longer the case. South Africa and its neighbours have grown beyond the stage of being missionary countries, and the time has come for us to take on the responsibilities of an established and self-reliant church. Catholic schools should now be able to rely on the lay faithful to rise to this challenge.

We call on all members of the Catholic community to value our schools, and encourage Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools. We urge parents to be actively involved in school life, particularly in governing bodies. Parents play a central role in supporting and promoting the vision of education on which our schools are founded. Parishes are natural homes for Catholic schools and we need to re-establish closer links between priests and school communities where the links have been lost.

We are mindful that most Catholic children are not in Catholic schools, and we encourage both teachers and pupils to witness to the values of our faith in the public school system. We need to explore new ways of establishing schools in the future to meet the educational needs of Catholics. Our vision must embrace not only the maintenance and strengthening of the schools we have, but also the establishment of new ones. We invite those Catholics who have chosen the teaching profession to consider seriously the option of working in Catholic schools.

At the start of this school year, we invite Catholics across the region to join us in praying for all those involved in our schools. May this be a good year for pupils, staff, parents and governing body members, as well as the communities in which the schools are located. May God bless our schools so that they may be places of hope.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Buti Tlhagale". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Archbishop Buti Tlhagale OMI

Archbishop of Johannesburg.

President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference