

# THE REWARDS OF SENDING YOUR CHILD TO A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

## A SENSE OF BELONGING

**I have always loved and felt really comfortable with being in a Catholic school and have always felt a sense of belonging: being in community. I value the tradition, scripture, religious education, celebration and sacrament that are part of being in a Catholic School. To be involved in the mission of teaching the knowledge component of our faith, as well as being part of students'—and their families'—faith formation in today's social climate is very rewarding.**

When I was six years old, my teacher was a very young woman in her first year of teaching. I believe she was about nineteen years old. She was clever, creative, kind, inspirational and pretty; and far more interesting to me than the nuns that were still dressed in quite traditional habits. I adored her and decided at age six I wanted to be a teacher just like her. I never changed my mind. Over the years I often ran into her: she was classroom teaching and I had become a principal. I made sure that she knew that her positive influence was the reason I was there.

Being a principal is exciting in one sense because it's almost a whole career change. You go from teaching in the classroom to becoming a financial manager; an expert on building, repairs and maintenance; a family law consultant; counsellor; technology guru; careers advisor and WH&S officer; religious/pastoral leader; etc... I would most liken it to becoming a parent for the first time: a great responsibility where the buck stops with you and the decisions you make can impact on a whole community and its growth/success. But there is also the delight of great hopes, dreams, aspirations and a vision for learning and creating a community that's almost like family.

The children remain a great joy: seeing them learn and grow and then leaving us for high school and being really proud of a job well done!

Of course, there are difficulties; on any given day a whole range of issues arise and need to be resolved. Dealing with parents/families and all the relational issues impact heavily on your time when, ideally, you would like to be spending that time on educational and learning-focused issues. Compliance requirements can become problematic. Technology has also had an impact on both

maintenance and everyone's expectations of immediate response and action to problems.

I think prioritising and managing time—as well as taking responsibility for children, staff and families—can sometimes become a real circus juggling act; it's up to me to keep all the balls in the air while staying sane and smiling all the while!

Gera Guilhaus: Catholic School Principal

## WHY A CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

**We made the choice (and the financial sacrifice) to send our children to Catholic schools. Why? Upon reflection, I have come up with three reasons: inertia, spirituality and community.**

I must admit, it was a confusing time when we were new parents. Deciding on something as momentous as where to send your child to school is difficult for many

reasons, not the least of which is how hard it is to decipher the marketing hyperbole and how hard it is to know your child's learning style—and even personality—when he is a baby or toddler! So we narrowed the field by falling back on our family's tradition of Catholic schooling: inertia. Catholic schooling, we felt, instilled in us a love of learning, but it also equipped us to handle life's many curve balls.

Well, that's why we chose Catholic

schooling for our children in the first place, but the more interesting question, I think, is: why did we stick with it?

There is so much talk today about educating the 'whole child' and we felt that this was impossible to do without including his spiritual side. Our school beautifully integrates spirituality into their everyday life, and it does so in subtle ways across all areas of the curriculum: on the sporting fields, in the disciplinary policies, in the social justice programs, in school liturgies, and in daily prayers and meditation time. Children are given time and space to reflect on what Christ's message means to them. This Catholicism in school reinforces our family values: compassion, respect, love, humility and forgiveness ... among many others.

In so many ways, Jesus' message of love is lived out at Catholic schools.

An unexpected side effect of choosing a Catholic



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school for our children is that I have had the opportunity to reconsider where I am on my spiritual journey. Through the school I have heard talks, panel discussions, sermons, prayers, and have had discussions with my children and other parents that have called into question my old-fashioned religious notions. For the first time in my adult life, I have actively engaged in developing and deepening my own spiritual side. Like my children, I have grown in this spirit of love.

Finally, the community that we have found through our school has dramatically enriched our lives. Teachers, administrators, parents and students drawn to Catholic schools share a special bond and commitment. Each member of our family has experienced love and support from our school community. I think that, again, this is our shared belief in the teachings of Jesus that connects us in a profound way to each other. Not everyone in our community is Catholic, in fact our community includes non-Catholic Christians, Jewish families, Muslim families, and Atheists; but the universal message of Christ's love binds us to each other.

**Jeanne Bridgers:**  
Catholic School Parent

## THE DECISION

**M**ike and I wanted a Christian education for our children. We wanted the added support it would offer us in passing on our faith, and the continuity it would provide in the practice of our faith: that what was instilled in the kids at home would be reinforced by the schools.

We were hopeful that the Christian values—especially respect for elders and others—would be deeply embedded in the teachings and in the Catholic system as a whole.

We also felt that Catholic schools had a high general quality of teachers and more effective methods. There was also the care and support of the Church, and the sense of belonging to the Catholic community.

## My memory of the experience

I felt proud that I was supported by Mike and about the financial sacrifice we undertook in order to give our children what we saw was a better education.

Looking back now, I feel that there could have been a deeper quality of education in the faith and the rituals.

From my perception, I believe that Religious education was not on par with the other subjects and was of lesser importance.

There were distinct differences between our two boys and our two girls, who were some ten years younger. The boys seemed to have been led towards a stronger sense of faith.

## My memory of my own Catholic school

Having gone to numerous Catholic schools in the Philippines, the students were heavily involved in various rituals and teachings, such as weekly Masses, family Masses, monthly confessions, annual retreats, and various other prayers and gatherings during the liturgical seasons, even doing catechism classes alongside public school students and the poor.

Faith education was on top of the list of any Catholic schooling. Attendance was compulsory.

The faith was so instilled in all of us that I guess it was easier then: the majority of the population was Catholic (some 90%). Attending Church services and following its teachings were a part of growing up.

## The difference between being a student and a parent

Student: Obedience and respect ... we did not dare question! We followed and did what we were told to do. We

still have the faith. It was a different generation. That faith has grown into a more mature faith, and a deeper sense of God.

Parent: You hope to see the children accept the faith handed down from generation to generation within the family. You hope for the children to have a deeper understanding, a sense and presence of God's love in their lives, and to head towards a more adult faith. You hope for the children to experience and witness the faith that we witnessed through our parents and grandparents

**Mari Palomares:** Former Catholic School Parent

