

Aiding Understanding, Parent Resource

Damien Walker

A 90-minute parent information session called 'Aiding Understand' was developed and produced. This session introduces to Made in the Image of God (MITIOG) program (the content and what is being taught) to parents who children are students in Year 8, whilst also aiding the parents understanding of core Catholic belief and theology that underpin the content of this program.

Theological Foundation

I felt as a catholic educator, it was not only my role to educate my students but also educate the parents of these students. This is set forth in our identity and mission of a Catholic School. This is in Faith, in Learning and in Community.

Strengthening my own understanding of my faith and the theology behind it and then being able to articulate this to parents is a key part to this exercise and something that is necessary part of this session to be successful. This resource, like MITIOG, which a human sexuality curriculum for South Australian Catholic Schools, is grounded in strong Catholic Tradition that embraces the value and dignity of all human persons and a loving relationship with God and that all are loved (MITIOG 2). Pope John Paul II as the task of New Evangelisation, posed 'Each Christians word and life must make a proclamation resound with God love for you, Christ came for you and Christ is for you'' and this can be seen in the basis of this program and session (Sharkey 2002, p.38).

This resource could be used in a dialogue school. It has the ability and power to strengthen faith and learning of the parents within the school but at the same time the students and the teacher(s) are also have their faith-journey enhanced. This is possibly useful for new teachers entering the school, without a strong catholic theological background or knowledge of MITIOG. This resource however is directed at the Parents. It is designed to engage and open up discussion about Catholic Teaching on Moral and Ethical issues, with hope to enable parents to compliment and understand teachings that occur in class for the benefit of their child/ren. It is explores contemporary topical issue with a catholic view that are included are; Homosexuality, Faith Differences, Marriage, Sex, Contraception, Euthanasia, Sexual Identity and Abortion.

This resource is about education of the Catholic Belief and filling in that gaps of the parents, whilst acknowledging that they are not always likely to be practicing/active Catholics, let alone part of the church at all. This resources looks to provide the best outcome for the students through developing the parents understanding. Parents are then able to complement, what we as teacher are facilitating in the classroom,

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strengthening the child's understanding of theology indirectly. This is grounded in the understand of all human dignity and the right to love.

The views presented on these issues underpin Catholic values and present to what we all are called to, 'a loving relationship with our God' and that our faith is heavily ground is the value and dignity of all human people regardless of decision made, gender, sexuality or religion.

This document looks to strengthen connection the parents have to their child's faith learning and their faith journey, through opening decision and making parents aware just what is going on in the MITIOG program and linking the child and parent through their Catholic Faith. Parents at this age need to play an active role in the Faith Journey of their Children, historically secondary education is a time, where parent are as active in the school life of their children, generally a time where independence is established but is is noted that families are essential to the success and wellbeing of young people their secondary schooling (Commonwealth in Australia, 2006). It is also, a period, where our young people start to question the concept of religion, God and end up disengaged with faith, which then set them up to be able to easily move away (or go on hiatus) from the Church/Faith after leaving the faith-learning community that is a Catholic school (Stetzer 2014). This resource looks to deter this from happening and allow parents to consider their role in their child's faith-learning journey and show just how important their child/ren and the child's or children's s faith journey is but at the same time make faith relevant to the families within the school community.

Educational Foundation

The resource is intended for use in the first term of year eight. It would allow parents of students starting year 8 and their time in this school to be introduced to the MITIOG Program but also learn about and develop their own faith through understand the core value and belief that catholic hold on specific issues and belief within the Catholic Church. This resource is ONLY THE BEGINNING designed explores parent and student faith and open up discussion and further research. It is provide to give an understanding of the basis of core teaching and beliefs that underpin MITIOG. I feel that with parents and child in our school not all being practicing catholic or member of the catholic church, letting parent know of where the approach in the MITIOG is coming from, is truly important and strength the faith journey of parents, teachers and students.

The information session would start off with prayer that links back to the program goal – Genesis 1:27-28. This is to set the scene and reinforce the point that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Then would move in to a brief introduction to what MITIOG is and how it is structured throughout year 8 – 12. This would then follow on to looking at the catholic tradition and the view we hold on some topical issues of today. in between each topical issue, the teacher would invite discussion with parent to clarify any issues.

Teachers should note that the description of the core belief and theology held brief and do not do justice to the breadth of theology or research underpinning each response. These are designed to be snapshots of the Catholic Tradition and faith. They need to be followed up by further consultancy, research or dialogue. These slides can open up a lot of questions for a range of people experiencing the 'grayness' of life. Use these, knowing you can enter into dialogue if someone is distressed or confused by the information. Do not use slides that I could not follow up on, meaning only use one that you have the content and knowledge to make informed discussion and follow up with parents. It is integral that the teacher have the background and theological knowledge to back up what they say.

The following strategies and advice are offer to teacher delivery and preparing this presentation:

Teachers delivery this session should have the Assitant Principal Identity and Mission (APRIM) sit in on the session should any issues arise that require assistance and backing up. The APRIM and teacher need to be on the same page.

Add and edit slide with different topical issues that they have the acquire background of theological understanding to answer. Do not put yourself in situations that are uncomfortable. The session is designed to open up discussion after presenting each topical issue, allowing parents appropriate clarification, discussion time and to ask any questions.

If find you have a 'out spoken' parent that is going against the stance you present to them, it is important not to dismiss this. Teachers should acknowledge their feelings and follow up with correct theology to back up stance.

For example, if a parent was persistent that Homosexuality was a sin or an abomination then you would follow up linking back the loving relationship we are all called to with God and mention that we are all made in the image and likeness of god. The issue the church has lies in Same Sex Marriage, as marriage is between a man and women and for the purposes of procreation. Should this persist, invite the APRIM to clarify and then invite the parent to meet with you and the APRIM privately to discuss this further, as this is not the time to have this debate.

Conclusion

This resource explores catholic faith and culture whilst engaging with the life of Jesus Christ which creates creative dialogue within the school community. People (teachers, students and parents) are educated through the creation of dialogue to make informed decision based on core catholic beliefs and theology. I acknowledge that this can only be achieved when parents and teachers of the school choose to live, behave and witness as the best Catholics they can be and model this... this resource tries to engage parents and open discussion in order to aid understanding strengthen individual within this faith learning community and aiding best learning outcome and engagement with faith/learning journey for the students.

When presenting to my colleagues: They suggested that this resource would be useful resource for them to use during their teaching career and even just the process of them being able engage on this level with the MITIOG Documents and research and understand particular catholic beliefs was essential and beneficial for their development as Catholic Educators. They were unsure also how they would address an outspoken parent with contradictory traditional view that are create a negative impact. This for me comes down to the each individual teacher being able to back the research and beliefs they are presenting and also not letting it take over. This is why it is important teacher add and edit slide with topical contemporary issues to suit they knowledge and also have a prim sit in session to assist with anything like this. This issue was addressed in aforementioned Education Foundation section.

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