

# Religious Education Reference Group: Update

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## To Know and to Love

### Update on the work of the Religious Education Curriculum

#### Meeting #13 of the Religious Education Reference Group

Thursday 5 February 2026

The thirteenth meeting of the Religious Education Reference Group was held in February, the first for the year in 2026. The meeting continued to open with shared prayer and acknowledgement of country, prepared by **Ms Joanne Bacash**. Joanne centred prayer on the Feast of St Maroun, the Founder of the Maronite Catholic Church.

*O God, You guided Your Saint Maroun to the ascetic life, granted him divine virtues, and led him on the difficult path towards the Heavenly Kingdom. We ask You, through his intercession, to shower us with Your love so that we may walk in Your path, learn thy commandments, and follow the footsteps of our father, St. Maroun, so that his holy life may shine in our lives.*

*St Maroun, Pray for Us.*



**Prof Br David Hall FMS** offered opening reflections, drawing on recent school visits that highlighted strong engagement from staff with Catholic identity and the RE curriculum trials. He then shared a theological reflection inspired by Pope Leo's apostolic letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, outlining three themes guiding the direction of the curriculum. Br David shared three themes in the apostolic letter: Education as the Fabric of Evangelisation; Building Bridges, Not Walls; Human Dignity, Justice and Trust. Alongside these three themes Br David affirmed that Religious Education needs to be woven into the broader school environment in a way that fosters empathy, social responsibility, and attends to global realities where Catholic Social Teaching remains a crucial point of guidance.

The main points of the meetings are described below.

## Theory of Religious Education

**Prof Kath Engebretson** presented the draft Theory of Religious Education document, articulating the vision underpinning the curriculum. She outlined three interconnected dimensions of Catholic school education:

- Whole School Culture, which expresses a Catholic worldview through relationships, policies, values, and ethos rooted in the belief that each person is created in the image of God.
- School as Ecclesial Community, which includes prayer, sacraments, the liturgical seasons, justice initiatives, and mission, shared across the whole school rather than confined to the RE classroom.
- Classroom Religious Education, which brings together rich theological knowledge with moments of evangelisation and catechesis, forming students in Scripture, doctrine, moral reasoning, and the life of the Church.

Kath emphasised the distinction and interplay between Religious Education, evangelisation, and catechesis, noting that while catechesis often occurs outside the classroom (e.g. retreats, sacramental preparation), kerygmatic moments still arise within formal learning. She highlighted the curriculum's design as kerygmatic, coherent, and cumulative, ensuring clear thematic development from Foundation to Year 10.

## Senior Secondary Religious Education

**Prof Kath Engebretson** also presented a proposal for the development of a Years 11–12 Religious Education policy to be completed by the end of 2026. This work will review existing offerings—such as VCE Religion and Society and VCE Texts and Traditions—while identifying strong practices in schools and exploring models for school-based RE for students who do not undertake VCE RE subjects.

The intention is to align senior RE with the theological and pedagogical foundations established in F–10, and to learn from national examples. The proposed advisory group will include expert practitioners from Religion and Society, Texts and Traditions, and school-based RE, along with representatives from mission, classical education, curriculum writing, and national Catholic education networks. The group will meet monthly, with recommendations brought back to the Reference Group.

### Year 1

**Marsha Van Cuylenburg** presented a unit called The Holy Family, which introduces students to Jesus' early life and the loving relationships within the Holy Family. Through stories of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, students explore qualities such as love, forgiveness, gratitude, and trust in God. The unit also introduces the Feast of the Epiphany, highlighting the universality of God's love. Creative tasks—including hinge questions and deeper learning prompts—support students in expressing their understanding of family, belonging, and God's care. Feedback affirmed the clarity and developmental appropriateness of the unit, with suggestions to add scriptural references for teachers, include notes on the Magi, and handle the diversity of family structures with sensitivity. The group also emphasised the importance of distinguishing between honouring Mary and worshipping God, as well as ongoing teacher formation to support theological confidence.

### Year 6

**Prof Kath Engebretson** presented a unit called In the Spirit of the Saints, the third in the Confirmation catechesis sequence, which explores the fruits of the Holy Spirit through the lives of inspiring saints. Students encounter a wide range of holy men and women—including Mary

MacKillop, St Philip Neri, St Kateri Tekakwitha, Blessed Carlo Acutis, and St Thérèse of Lisieux—each exemplifying a particular fruit such as love, patience, generosity, or self-control. The unit was praised for its creativity, diversity, and contemporary relevance, offering students meaningful models for Christian living. Suggestions included providing a glossary of saints for Confirmation name discernment, expanding the selection to include lesser-known saints, and offering notes to help teachers explain legendary saints within Catholic tradition. Members also highlighted the need for strong professional learning to support the theology of Confirmation.

## **Year 9**

**James O'Brien** presented a unit called Personhood as a Call to Flourish, which explores what it means to be human in relationship with God, others, and the community. Across three learning sequences—right relationship with God and others, a vision of flourishing, and community as a place of love and service—students consider how Jesus enables human flourishing and how Christian anthropology shapes identity and purpose. The unit received strong affirmation for its theological depth and alignment with Catholic teaching, with recommendations to expand the timeframe beyond nine hours and strengthen the language around personhood. Suggestions included clarifying phrases such as “ease in relationship with God” through links to Ignatian spirituality, improving visuals used for conceptual diagrams, and adding vocabulary lists to support comprehension. Members also encouraged the inclusion of female Doctors of the Church and additional revision tools. The assessment task involving parish research and symbol interpretation was especially praised for its richness and authenticity.