

Religious Education Reference Group: Update

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To Know and to Love

Update on the work of the Religious Education Curriculum

Meeting #11 of the Religious Education Reference Group

Friday 24 October

The eleventh meeting of the Religious Education Reference Group was held in October, the third last for the year. The meeting continued to open with shared prayer and acknowledgement of country, prepared by **Rev Justin Ford**. Fr Justin drew on Pope St John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001).

'O Mary, Help of Christians, in our need we turn to you with eyes of love, with empty hands and longing hearts. We look to you that we may see your Son, our Lord. We lift our hands that we may have the Bread of Life. We open wide our hearts to receive the Prince of Peace.'
(John Paul II, 2001)

Dr Nigel Zimmermann began the meeting by noting apologies from several members of the reference group. He and **Dr Janine Biggin** then reported on their presentation at the October Principals Forum. Principals were formally introduced to their leadership role in Religious Education. The presentation highlighted that principals are not only supporters of their Religious Education Leaders (RELs) but leaders of RE implementation, responsible for empowering and sustaining their teams as the new curriculum is adopted. Feedback from principals was highly positive, especially from those less familiar with the curriculum, while those already trialling units spoke very favourably, helping build momentum across schools.

The main points of the meetings are described below.

Dr Beth Nolen presented her qualitative analysis of feedback from trial-based learning teams. From teacher interviews and reflections, she identified eleven themes which she synthesised into three core questions:

- What support do teachers need to teach RE well?
- What makes learning meaningful for students?
- What pedagogical approaches enable deep engagement?

Teachers expressed a strong desire for ongoing content knowledge development and collegial support from RELs. A recurring theme was the need to connect RE meaningfully to students' real-life experiences.

Storytelling emerged as a consistently affirmed pedagogical strategy across primary and secondary settings. She also proposed the introduction of implementation leads, educators who would support small clusters of schools through check-ins, REL support, and feedback loops with the curriculum team. This model aims to embed ongoing professional learning and build system-wide capacity without reliance on full-day PDs.

Prof Kath Engebretson then presented a structured framework clarifying the purpose and nature of Religious Education. Drawing on key thinkers, she contrasted:

- Graham Rossiter’s stance that catechesis belongs outside the classroom (“creative divorce”)
- Thomas Groome’s holistic, life-integrated approach (“no divorce for the children’s sake”)

Kath emphasised that Groome’s understanding aligns more closely with affective education rather than catechesis as defined in Church documents. Using an example from Prof Richard Rymarz, she showed how RE, catechesis, and evangelisation can coexist in a diverse classroom, with teachers tailoring learning according to the faith background of students.

The discussion highlighted the need for:

- clear and consistent definitions of RE, catechesis, and evangelisation
- classroom-based examples demonstrating how these modes interact
- teacher-friendly supports such as short videos, annotated glossaries, and FAQs.

Year 1

Marsha Van Cuylenburg presented a Year 1 Lent unit containing sequences introducing Lent as a time of drawing closer to God, exploring Palm Sunday, and leading into the Easter Triduum. It was suggested that the unit could be reduced slightly through streamlining the content and easing the number of lessons required to teach the unit/

Feedback highlighted the strength of hinge questions, reflection prompts, and clear critical content. The group recommended considering a new unit title and suggestions were made to improve transitions between sequences and enhance teacher notes with clearer layout, subheadings, dot points, and bolded key ideas. Teacher formation was again emphasised as essential for confident delivery.

Year 6

Prof Kath Engebretson presented a unit called *Jesus, the fullness of Revelation*. This unit explores Jesus as the full revelation of God across three sequences, drawing on Hebrews, John’s Gospel, and Isaiah. Students engage with rich theological ideas through visual symbols such as Rublev’s icon and the Celtic knot, along with creative prayer practices and personalised engagement with Scripture (e.g. placing their name into the Isaiah text).

The group affirmed the depth and quality of the unit while recommending clarification around theological concepts such as “imprint of God” and “persons of the Trinity.” Hinge questions may further support student understanding. Suggestions also included emphasising Christianity’s distinctive claims (“God is love”) and providing teacher formation resources, such as a short video or podcast on Dei Verbum.

Year 8

James O’Brien presented this final Year 8 unit, focusing on Pentecost, the conversion and mission of St Paul, and selected letters including Galatians and Corinthians. The unit was praised for its balanced scope, avoiding overwhelming detail while giving students clear access to essential ideas. Activities include Scripture engagement, artwork analysis, and reflective writing.

Members suggested integrating more of Paul's letters if time permits and encouraging students to recognise Pauline texts when they appear as second readings at Mass. The inclusion of Phoebe and Lydia as early female leaders was particularly affirmed as both meaningful and well-integrated. The unit effectively bridges into Year 9's study of the Church and the sacraments.

Year 10

Kyle Hoad presented a full-year scheme outlining how the Year 10 curriculum explores human dignity, conscience, sin, virtue, sexuality, stewardship, and eschatology. The structure was praised for its logical sequencing and coherence, bringing together foundations laid in Years 7–9 and preparing students for ethical decision-making and VCE pathways.

Recommendations included strengthening alignment with the structure of the Catechism and expanding teaching on original sin and grace. Members encouraged emphasising the eternal significance of moral choices. The group affirmed that the schema should function as a leadership planning tool, not a teacher-facing document, to avoid overwhelming classroom staff.