

Study and Discussion Guide

The Catholic School

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education

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Developed by:



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

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Background

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education issued *The Catholic School* in 1977 to develop the ideas presented by Vatican Council II in *Gravissimum Educationis* (*The Declaration on Christian Education*). The principles contained in *The Declaration on Christian Education* are applicable to all efforts of Catholic education. *The Catholic School*, as the title indicates, applies those principles specifically to the Catholic school on the primary, elementary and secondary levels.

Although developed primarily as a tool for group discussion, the Study and Discussion Guide may also be used as a resource for independent study and reflection. It can be useful for professional development for those who serve in Catholic schools or as a means to inform and involve parents in discussions on Catholic education.

The Catholic School is available on the Holy See's website.

Click below to access the document.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html

Format

The format of the Guide is meant to provide room for note-taking when reading or discussing the document. Because of the nature and content of this document, the format does not follow a typical question and answer design. Rather, selected statements are taken from each major section of the document and are presented for reflection and response. This approach has as its aim to facilitate the application of the statement to one's own circumstance or to the particular school setting. At the same time, the representative statements are chosen to highlight the major teachings contained in the document. The paragraph number is included with each question to focus the consideration, not to minimize other paragraphs in the section. *Direct quotations from the document are in italics.*



INTRODUCTION TO *The Catholic School* (Paragraphs #1-#4)

Q. 1.

In #4, The Sacred Congregation for Education presents a list of all those who “are responsible for education. Who is included in this list? What two words characterize the service which is to be given by Catholic schools? What is the significance of these two designations?

Part I: The Catholic School and the Salvific Mission of the Church (Paragraphs 5- 15)

Q. 1.

#7 Evangelization is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God.

How does the Catholic school contribute to the evangelizing mission of the Church both for students and for others?

Q. 2.

In #8, it is stated that the Church “*establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed.*”

How does your school provide for the formation of the “whole person?”



Part II: Present Difficulties over Catholic Schools (Paragraphs 16-24)

Q.1

In Paragraphs **#17-23**, several objections to Catholic schools are presented. What are some of these objections? How does the document (**at the end of #24**) begin to answer these objections?

Part III: The School as a Center of Human Formation (Paragraphs 25-32)

Q.1

In **#26**, a school is defined as “*a privileged place in which, through a living encounter with a cultural inheritance, integral formation occurs.*” What makes your school “a privileged place” for the students, the faculty and for parents?

Q.2

Paragraph **#29** discusses “a common vision, a common outlook on life, based on adherence to a scale of values” that is necessary for those in the Catholic school? Of what does this common vision consist?

Part IV: The Educational Work of the Catholic School (Paragraphs 33-63)

Q.1

#34. Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps man to direct his thought, action and will according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes his norm of life. The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school "Catholic"; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal.

What is the impact of having a “shared vision” of what a school should be?

How are “principles of the Gospel” evident in your school? (You might consider such areas as curriculum, conduct codes, extracurricular functions and inter-personal relations).

Q. 2

In # 47, the document states that “Baptism by itself does not make a Christian.” What other condition is necessary?

Q. 3

According to #49, what is the specific mission of the Catholic school?



Q. 4

#55. The Catholic school loses its purpose without constant reference to the Gospel and a frequent encounter with Christ. It derives all the energy necessary for its educational work from Him and thus "creates in the school community an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love"(20). In this setting the pupil experiences his dignity as a person before he knows its definition. Faithful, therefore, to the claims of man and of God, the Catholic school makes its own contribution towards man's liberation, making him, in other words, what his destiny implies, one who talks consciously with God, one who is there for God to love.

Give examples of the way in which the atmosphere of your school reflects the description in this paragraph. How could it be more so?

Q. 5

62. The Catholic school community, therefore, is an irreplaceable source of service, not only to the pupils and its Other members, but also to society. Today especially one sees a world which clamors for solidarity and yet experiences the rise of new forms of individualism. Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good. In the pluralistic society of today the Catholic school, moreover, by maintaining an institutional Christian presence in the academic world, proclaims by its very existence the enriching power of the faith as the answer to the enormous problems which afflict mankind. Above all, it is called to render a humble loving service to the Church by ensuring that she is present in the scholastic field for the benefit of the human family.

How does the Catholic school serve society?

Part V: The Responsibility of the Catholic School Today

(Paragraphs 64-68)

Q. 1

#66. Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realization of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness. One must recognize that, more than ever before, a Catholic school's job is infinitely more difficult, more complex, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in fresh garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and, particularly, when a pluralist mentality dominates and the Christian Gospel is increasingly pushed to the side-lines.

In what ways are the elements of Catholic identity present in your school? How can this identity be strengthened even more?

VI. Practical Directions

(Paragraphs 69-82)

Q. 1

#78. By their witness and their behavior teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools. It is, therefore, indispensable to ensure their continuing formation through some form of suitable pastoral provision. ..

What would you consider to be effective ways of providing continuing formation to teachers?



VII. Courageous and Unified Commitment

(Paragraphs 83-90)

Q. 1

87. If all who are responsible for the Catholic school would never lose sight of their mission and the apostolic value of their teaching, the school would enjoy better conditions in which to function in the present and would faithfully hand on its mission to future generations. They themselves, moreover, would most surely be filled with a deep conviction, joy and spirit of sacrifice in the knowledge that they are offering innumerable young people the opportunity of growing in faith, of accepting and living its precious principles of truth, charity and hope.

How can we as Catholic educators make sure we “never lose sight of “the mission?
How does losing sight of the mission impact the quality of Catholic education?

VIII. Conclusion

(Paragraphs 91-93)

Q. 1

#91. This document in no way wishes to minimize the value of the witness and work of the many Catholics who teach in State schools throughout the world. In describing the task confided to the Catholic school it is intended to encourage every effort to promote the cause of Catholic education, since in the pluralistic world in which we live, the Catholic school is in a unique position to offer, more than ever before, a most valuable and necessary service. With the principles of the Gospel as its abiding point of reference, it offers its collaboration to those who are building a new world - one which is freed from a hedonistic mentality and from the efficiency syndrome of modern consumer society.

What do you judge to be the “valuable and necessary service” which Catholic schools render: to its students, to the Church, to the world at large?

