

On the home page of our Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education website we find a sentence expressing our vision for our school communities. “As partners in Catholic education and open to God’s presence, we pursue fullness of life for all.” These words sum up a great deal about our aims as a Catholic education community. We seek to be partners in Catholic education, partners with students, partners with students’ families, partners with our teaching colleagues, partners with the parish community, partners with the broader community. As a Catholic education community, we acknowledge God as the One who has made us and all creation. We acknowledge God as the One who sustains us, and we seek to be open to God’s presence. As a Catholic education community, we seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He came that people might have life and have it to the full. In union with him, we pursue fullness of life for all.

This statement on our website highlights key elements of our vision for Catholic education and provides us with a fine reference point for our service. But, of course, we cannot express everything in one sentence. It is good to look to other sources to enrich our understanding.

This morning I would like to encourage you to look to our Christian Scriptures as a treasure house of inspiration for our service in Catholic education. What we read in the Scriptures will fill out what it means to be partners in Catholic education, what it means to be open to God’s presence, what it means to pursue fullness of life for all.

We have a very rich text as our second reading this morning, verses from the letter of St Paul to the Romans. St Paul lists a number of qualities that are appropriate for a community that is seeking to follow Christ. He begins by urging the community to show real love. “Let love be genuine.” This implies that love is sometimes not genuine. Sometimes love is a pretence. People might speak of love but not show love in practice. St Paul then says, “Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.” Genuine love seeks to do what is best for the other person. This can involve resisting what would be harmful for that person as well as promoting what would be helpful.

These lines from St Paul include some phrases that we have chosen as a kind of refrain for this year as we mark the 150th anniversary of our diocese. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, be faithful in prayer.” Each of these phrases expresses aspects that have been important in the life of our diocese all through our history and they express aspects that continue to be important now and will continue to be important in the years ahead.

From the beginning of our diocese in 1874, our parish communities and our school communities have experienced times of trial as well as times of gladness. Through it all, there have been wonderful people, people who have laid the foundations of our parishes and schools, people who have been joyful in hope and patient in affliction. They have recognised that any achievements have depended on God’s blessing, so they have been faithful in prayer day by day.

We continue to need these qualities in our parishes and schools today and we will continue to need them in the days and weeks and years ahead. Through all the joys and through all the challenges we face, may we be people who rejoice in hope. May we be patient in affliction. May we be faithful in prayer. If we are, we will be well on the way to fulfilling our Catholic education vision. We will be helping to bring fullness of life to all.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR