



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops support Catholic schools with guide on gender, identity

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has released a guide on gender and identity to support Catholic schools in responding to the individual social and pastoral needs of students.

Created and Loved: A guide for Catholic schools on identity and gender outlines a pastoral approach shaped by the theological, medical and legislative context in which Catholic schools operate.

The bishops consulted widely with specialists in education, including principals and teachers, sought advice from parents with children facing various gender questions, heard from bioethicists and other experts in the field, and from the international Church community.

Increasing rates of gender incongruence in Australian society are seen as an invitation to reflect deeply on the biblical and Christian witness to human dignity. The guide offers principles that can be used by Catholic education authorities for their own local contexts.

“The Catholic Church and our schools begin from the foundational principle that each person is created in the image and likeness of God, and is loved by God,” said Archbishop Peter A Comensoli, chair of the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement.

“That principle guides this document, which we offer to our schools to support them in walking compassionately alongside each student we are invited to educate.”

Archbishop Comensoli said *Created and Loved* is grounded in Christian anthropology, which values the worth and dignity of every person, and also sees each person holistically, rather than defining that person by any single characteristic.

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Jacinta Collins said the guide will be the focus of a session with hundreds of Catholic educators during the National Catholic Education Conference underway in Melbourne.

“This will be the first of many opportunities for Catholic education authorities and schools in the formation of leaders and teachers to reflect on how they can respond to gender and identity with care and sensitivity,” she said.

Ms Collins said Catholic school communities already capably manage students’ needs in this area, but the guide will offer further advice that draws on theological, psychological, medical and legislative knowledge.

“Recent comments by eminent psychologist Professor Ian Hickie highlight the increasing number of medical professionals who are challenging the gender-affirmative approach and are supporting the biopsychosocial approach, which is less invasive, holistic and more closely aligned with a Catholic worldview,” she said.

“It remains critical that our Catholic schools can speak about the Church’s teachings on these matters in an informed way, underpinned by the principles of respect and human dignity.

“Catholic schools are uniquely pastoral communities, but it is vital that the Catholic vision of the whole person informs our understanding. *Created and Loved* outlines a sound basis for that approach.”

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Archbishop Comensoli said Catholic school leaders are well placed to respond to pastoral needs in informed and sensible ways, free of politics and the division sometimes seen in the wider community.

The Catholic position is to support the needs of each individual based on their circumstances, respectful of the person and the wider school community of students and families.

“Catholic schools are beautiful communities of encounter with the risen Jesus, who loves us unconditionally and challenges us to grow in our wisdom and understanding,” Archbishop Comensoli said.

He said the guide will build on the engagement and formation that education authorities are undertaking as they develop practical local guidelines.

“It will be reviewed in time, and the guide will evolve,” Archbishop Comensoli said.

Created and Loved can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/CreatedandLoved>