



*Opening Address
by*

*Robin Sullivan
Commissioner for Children and Young People*

at the

QCEC In-Service Training Workshop

at

Xavier Province Centre, Indooroopilly

on

Wednesday 26th February 2003

Acknowledgements

- Dr Bill Sultmann, Chair of the Working Party
- Representatives of the Diocesan Catholic Education Authorities and Religious Institute Schools.

Thank you for inviting me to open this important in-service day.

The Catholic Education system has an important role to play in the area of child protection, and I commend the Queensland Catholic Education Commission for tackling this important project.

I understand the student protection manual has been developed in consultation with a range of child and youth-focussed organisations, including the Commission for Children and Young People and Catholic schools across the state.

I'm sure it will be an important resource for everyone present today, and I strongly urge you to lend your support to its introduction in schools throughout the state.

I think you will agree that this is an essential document to promote the protection of children and young people in Catholic schools.

Given the recent difficulties faced by the Church, this manual demonstrates a strong and positive commitment to the ongoing improvement of child protection in one of our most important social institutions.

I believe the manual will provide a valuable point of reference for Catholic school authorities and the schools within their jurisdiction.

Although not every school is expected to follow the manual to the letter, it can be used in a way that most appropriately suits each site, and assist in ensuring all adhere to legislative requirements.

I urge you to read this, take on board the guidelines, and provide feedback to the Queensland Catholic Education Commission.

In particular, I'd like thank the QCEC for inviting the Commission for Children and Young People to help develop this document.

It's very satisfying to see the expertise of the Commission recognised by organisations like yours, and I look forward to working with you in the future to help you refine your child protection frameworks.

Of course, as Commissioner for Children and Young People, this resource is of particular interest to me.

In my role, I am charged with – among other things – fostering a community culture that focuses on children and young people's interests, needs, rights and responsibilities, and with ensuring every child and young person is valued and protected.

Children and young people's protection and wellbeing demand our individual and collective attention. As employees of Catholic schools in Queensland you have a three fold justification for promoting such a culture.

The first lies in the Judaeo Christian ethical tradition which is expressed in such phrases as "Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Luke, 18) and

“...whoever welcomes a little child ... in my name, welcomes me...

(Matthew, 18, verses 5&6)

The second lies in the fact that Australia has a relevant legislative framework ranging from ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to the Queensland 1999 Child Protection Act, the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000, and the 2001 Education (Accreditation of Non State Schools) Act.

The third justification for your commitment to child friendly communities lies in social commentator Hugh McKay's caution that

Our children are like signposts to the future of our society; they tell us what we are becoming. But they are also our most precious resource for shaping the future, so we had better make sure we are nurturing them and support[ing] them to the limit of our capacityⁱ

I hope these justifications are sufficient to encourage you all to support the development and implementation of these guidelines.

In this environment, I cannot resist concluding with a poetic homily – its about the eighth deadly sin of our new millennium - detachment.

How easy it is, in our contemporary world, to be cynical and critical in our approach to the topics to be addressed in this workshop.

The wages of this sin of detachment are eloquently described in a poem by William Staffordⁱⁱ :

*If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.*

*For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.*

*And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.*

*And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider —
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.*

*For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give — yes or no, or maybe —
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.*

You, as educators working within the ethics of your profession, the doctrinal framework of Christianity and our relevant state legislation, and I as Commissioner for Children and Young People must resist the temptations of detachment.

I join with you in seeing this workshop as taking forward, in considered and practical ways, effective child protection practices for Catholic schools in Queensland.

ⁱ <http://www.chatabox.com.au/cfc/camp.htm>, 23.04.99

ⁱⁱ Bly, R (1996) *The Sibling Society*, Heinemann, Melbourne p.235.