Declaration of commitment to catholic education

Working together for catholic dialogue schools in Flanders

In Flanders and Brussels, a network of catholic educational institutes, united in Catholic Education Flanders, offers education for the young and the old. Based on the constitutional freedom of education, we model this education on the project of the catholic dialogue school. Inspired by its own catholic pedagogical tradition and concern about today’s world, this project challenges everyone who learns, works and lives in catholic schools to develop school in shared dialogue and while doing so, building the future society.

At the crossroads of education, Church and society, the catholic dialogue school warmly welcomes everyone, whatever his or her religious or ideological background may be. Pupils (including those attending boarding school, adult education, college or university students), parents, members of staff, administrators, all of them and without exception are invited to participate in its educational project. Proceeding from its Christian inspiration the catholic dialogue school wants to challenge and empower everyone to these ends:

- **As a school** it is convinced that quality education is more than just training and instruction. Education generates free persons, competent and standing by each other, people for whom living and living together is meaningful and of great significance. Within the school, learning to learn, learning to work and learning to live (together) go along. Education in its broadest sense empowers children, youngsters and adults to cope with the ever more complex world of today and tomorrow. They learn to discover this world and acquire the skills to immerse themselves in this world with commitment, a critical state of mind and creativity. This school is an inclusive school. It cares for the unique talents of every pupil, with special attention to those who experience difficulties.

- **As a catholic school** it is proceeding from the fundamental experience that both the human being and the world are a gift and an assignment all at once. As embedded in a network of relations with fellow human beings, with society and with the world, human freedom is a given freedom and incites responsibility. Trusting that the deepest mystery of reality is love, the school considers this love - as the Bible tells us and after the example of Jesus - as a guideline for educating, for living and for living together. The Christian hope originating from this love and the belief in the resurrection, directs the school in its goals and overall functioning.
• Given this view on humankind and on the world, in times of religious plurality, the catholic dialogue school invites everybody to go into dialogue with each other in search of the full meaning of being human. Therefore it brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, people from other beliefs and non-believers, and all other people who want to find significance in living and living together. In conversation with each other one learns to form one’s own identity, through discovering it, thinking about it and deepening it. Instructed by its own mission, the school itself, in words and praxis, brings the Christian voice into this conversation in a contemporary and challenging way, while additionally creating room for those who do not get a chance to enter into the conversation.

Making school in this way requires a persisting effort from everyone and offers room for growth and diversity. Throughout the dialogue the catholic dialogue school enriches itself and is also called to recontextualise its Christian inspiration in the contemporary context. Proceeding from the tradition to which the school belongs and in dialogue with its environment, the catholic dialogue school intends to be a training ground for living (together) in a world that is characterized by diversity and difference. Critically-creatively learning to get along with what is familiar and what is different, with what unites and what distinguishes, enables people to contribute to an open, meaningful, tolerant and enduring society, where everyone has a place - a world of which God dreams too.

According to their contexts and stakeholders catholic educational institutes translate this concept into a variety of pedagogical projects, resulting in as many different catholic dialogue schools. Schools, boarding schools, centres for adult education, university colleges and university: each of them in their own way continue building the manifold, rich, catholic pedagogical tradition in Flanders and Brussels. To cooperate in catholic dialogue schools requires a commitment of everyone who is involved in this education: pupils and parents, teachers and other staff, school leaders and members of the schoolboard. At the same time, the school and everyone learning and working there, has expectations towards the local community, the Church and society.

Pupils, boarders and students expect a tailor-made education of high quality, offered to them by an inspiring school and good enthusiastic teachers and educators. There they hope to grow being a human and fellow human in full, to take up their responsibility for the world surrounding them. In turn the school expects them to be willing to fully participate in this educational process and to be challenged by the best the catholic school can offer them today. In a context in which identity is not self-evident, they shape themselves and are shaped in dialogue with the school project and its tradition. They get into conversation with the teacher, with their fellow pupils and with the world. They take the opportunity to pupil participation offered generously by the school. In this way pupils actively contribute to school life and to the school as a learning, living and working community.

School staff give it their very best effort educating children, youngsters and adults into human beings who contribute freely and responsibly to today’s and tomorrow’s society. Even if the school’s catholic identity to them is no longer self-evident, within their assignment, they do choose to show dedication to this specific educational project. Moreover, they are privileged and essential partners in it. That is why the school expects all of them to actively contribute to life at the catholic dialogue school - in conversation with pupils, one another and the school leader(s). Whichever their convictions are, here is where they can find inspiration to collaborate in the catholic pedagogical project of the school. The school staff are people with passion and enthusiasm who like to get busy with pupils and colleagues. To this end they have the required
competencies: for the educational content as well as for pedagogical and didactic goals. They collaborate to create a learning environment in which every learner thrives and may learn, live and work. In their work and working side by side they are aware of their exemplary role.

With a sense of responsibility and great care school leaders direct the pedagogical project of the catholic dialogue school. As school leaders they want to give shape to this project, together with (other) staff members, and they want to create a dedicated learning and living environment with pupils, boarders and their parents as with students. Proceeding from their own inspiration they devote themselves to a generous, caring and fair-minded school and society, in which all pupils and staff members are welcome. They strive for dialogue based distributive leadership and create a durable and caring staff policy. They work hard for a working environment which supports, motivates and values staff members.

For their children parents first of all expect the school to be a world in which they learn and live according to the education they themselves want to give them. Parents who choose a catholic school, state their confidence in how schools nowadays in diverse forms shape the project of the catholic dialogue school. The school in turn expects the parents to be true partners in the education and formation that the school provides for their children. To choose a catholic school implies a commitment of every partner. That is why parents may expect the school to involve them as much as possible in making school together.

Based on the constitutional freedom of education and embedded in the catholic pedagogical tradition, school boards have a specific role and responsibility in shaping the catholic dialogue school. First of all school board members link to tradition. They challenge school leaders and staff to renew this tradition and to collaborate with everyone in the school to make it into a catholic dialogue school. At the same time they create the managerial and organisational preconditions for those who learn, live and work in their educational institutes. They devote themselves to govern the school in a spirit of dialogue and distributive leadership and to give school leaders space to take up full responsibility. They guarantee the school is well embedded in the local community, they look for opportunities for governmental optimization and they cherish the special family ties with other educational institutes that are members of Catholic Education Flanders.

Finally, the catholic dialogue school is far from being isolated, yet is part of the tissue of the local community, the Church and society. For the local community the school often is a crossroads of dialogue and encounter. The school expects the local community to respect its project and asks for its support to take up this particular role. For the Church the catholic school is a tangible witness of its assistance to children, youngsters and adults for years on end. In a strongly changed context the Church expects the catholic school to testify of the Christian message in an authentic way. In turn the catholic dialogue school expects the Church to dedicate itself permanently in a dialogue with the school and to inspire - also today - youngsters and adults. Society rightly sets expectations to catholic education and the quality to be achieved in education. Vice versa catholic education asks sufficient freedom and the necessary means to fully take up its responsibility. For it is from the best of its traditions that it moulds the catholic dialogue school as a training ground and a refuge for living together in a world of diversity and difference.