GREVILLEA

May, 2010

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea'? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Ethical Responsibility.**

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to live out their faith by living ethically. While the Holy Spirit and the example of Jesus can guide and motivate us in doing so, we also need to give careful consideration to the situations and issues involved.

I have invited people from different backgrounds and perspectives to write on this subject. Sister Patricia Bolster has written an article from the perspective of one of the chaplains at Westmead Hospital. She works with Bruce Slater the Uniting Church chaplain there. They collaborated on the article. John Jegasothy has had a long standing involvement with refugees and has recently been recognised with an award for his work in this area. As a person from Sri Lanka himself he is aware of the racism that can emerge between people who are different. David Reichardt, presbytery minister for Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery, who has just completed a PhD in ecotheology, writes about his concern for the environment. Finally Geoff Stevenson has written an article drawing on his experience in local schools. He is a saxophone player and is involved in the music program of the local high school among other school involvements. Northmead Uniting Church has mentors in the local primary school through the *Kids Hope Aus* program.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au. I hope you find this edition of Grevillea both interesting and informative.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Sister Patricia Bolster RSM, is a full-time Chaplain at the Children's Hospital [Westmead], with pastoral care responsibility in the oncology ward. She is a member of the Research Ethics Committee for both the Children's Hospital [Westmead] and Westmead Hospital. She holds a doctorate in healthcare ethics and masters degrees in theology and education. She is a member of the Sisters of Mercy congregation.

APPROACHES TO ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

IN HEALTH CARE

A patient in the critical care unit of your local hospital dies of cardiac arrest. His family, uneasy about the circumstances of his death, requests a copy of his medical record and contacts a solicitor. An internal investigation reveals that an error a nurse made in giving the patient heart medication may have been a factor in his death. Management team members meet to discuss the case.

Examining the patient's medical record, they observe that the pertinent nursing notes are both incomplete and almost illegible. If they were to add a couple of smudges, this section of the record could be made completely illegible. And if they added an entry to the physician's order sheet, the error might be concealed altogether.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) argues against doing anything to the patient's medical record. "That would be dishonest," she says. "A medical record should never be altered."

However, the Director of Financial Services argues that, in this case, it would be relatively easy to conceal the nurse's error and that failing to do so could cause serious financial repercussions for the hospital. "No matter what we do, we can't bring this poor man back to life. Let's make the best of a bad situation."

The Director of Clinical Services agrees, adding, "What happened was unfortunate. But it would be wrong to let a vengeful family and a greedy lawyer, seriously undermine our responsibility to serve the health needs of this community."

But the Deputy Director of Clinical Services shakes her head. "I wouldn't feel good about lying," she says. "Covering this whole thing up just seems wrong to me."

How can this moral dilemma be resolved successfully - that is, in a way that enables everyone involved to offer his or her perspective on the issue at hand and, after the issue has been thoroughly discussed, to "buy into" the decision?

It is popular today for healthcare organizations to have some sort of model that leaders can use in making difficult ethical decisions. Most models consist of four parts: gathering the relevant information, listing the available choices, clarifying the values, and making a choice. The problem is that no model can guarantee participants that they have made the *right* choice. This is the nature of ethics; making an ethical

decision always means choosing between competing values, selecting one value over another.

Which value should be chosen in the case-study above, for instance? Honesty? Or preserving the hospital from potentially embarrassing and expensive liability? People of good-will can disagree about which of these values should prevail, as do the managers in this case.

How should healthcare leaders rank their values? Unfortunately, the literature on the subject does not offer clear-cut answers. Often the reader is given but a summary of some ethical theory and told to apply the theory to moral dilemmas. This is usually not helpful.

For most people, trying to apply ethical theories to a given problem feels artificial and awkward. They wind up saying "We need to do this to stay within budget--now what's the name of the principle we're supposed to be using to make this right?" and "Going in the direction you propose doesn't feel right to me, though I can't explain why." This is usually because different people think differently about ethics, and it's no good trying to force people, to use a model or theory that is foreign to their own way of making ethical decisions.

What we tend to forget is that ethical theories are not fabricated out of thin air, but rather are reflections of and elaborations on the lived experience of human beings seeking to live morally. People who have never heard of the different ethical theories nevertheless operate unconsciously out of one or more of those theories when they make ethical decision in their personal and professional lives.

Four Moral Approaches to Decision Making

There are generally four distinctly different ways in which people make ethical decisions. Almost everyone uses all four of these ways. We utilize different approaches in different roles, in different situations, at different times in our life. Yet we do so unreflectively and nearly always without making a conscious choice, and certainly not because of any allegiance to corresponding ethical theories.

Some people use one way predominantly; others vary their approach according to a variety of factors. Most potentially irresolvable conflicts occur when two parties argue or negotiate their positions from *different* moral approaches. Agreement or consensus may often occur only when the two parties adopt the *same* approach.

It is less important that we know the theories behind the four approaches than that we recognize the approaches themselves. If we find ourselves arguing our position from an approach different from the other party's, we may have to "change gears," maintaining our position but adopting the other party's approach. Otherwise, we and the other party may end up repeating our arguments, either failing to achieve consensus or reaching a win-lose solution.

The four moral approaches are *principle*, *consequence*, *virtue/character*, and *moral sentiment*.

Principle Approach

This approach is perhaps the most familiar to us since a lot of ethics education is based on principles.

Clinical ethics is predominantly principle based, teaching caregivers to apply such principles as autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Business ethics is also usually expressed in terms of principles, including those prohibiting fraud, misrepresentation, and false billing, for instance.

Put most succinctly, a principle is a general normative standard of conduct, holding that a particular decision or action is true or right or good for all people in all times and in all places. For a principle-oriented person, an action or decision is right or wrong regardless of the consequences. People who find it natural to use the principle approach to ethical decision making tend to use words like "must," "ought," "duty," "obligation," and "never."

Certain professional healthcare roles seem to attract people who use the principle approach. For example, many senior healthcare executives articulate principles in their decision making ("We must do what is best for the community")

We should all *sometimes* use the principle approach to ethical decision making; without principles, decision makers have no parameters limiting what they will or will not do. On the other hand, one who *always* uses the principle approach will likely be considered dogmatic and hard to get along with.

In the case cited at the beginning of this article, the Chief Executive Officer said that altering the medical record would be "dishonest," and should "never" be done, whatever the consequences. She is using the principle approach.

Consequence Approach

But what the Chief Executive Officer said failed to persuade the Director of Financial Services, who was essentially saying, "Look at all the bad things that will happen if we follow your principle of never altering medical records." The Director of Financial Services was using the consequence approach to ethical decision making.

People using this approach often ask such questions as, *What's the bottom line? What effect will this have? What good will this bring about? Will this help in the long run?* In the consequence approach, the decision maker weighs several possible results and arrives at the decision likely to produce the best result. The problem is that not everyone weighs and evaluates possible results in the same way.

This is why the Chief Executive Office and the Director of Finances in our case, failed to agree. The former, using the principle approach, kept repeating that it is wrong to lie and alter medical records. The latter, using the consequence approach, kept saying that it would be more wrong to allow the hospital to incur an avoidable costly lawsuit. They were not only arguing about different values; they were also using different approaches to moral decision making.

The consequence approach, like the principle approach, seems to attract certain kinds of people to certain healthcare roles.

Virtue/Character Approach

This approach resembles the principle approach except that the "moral oughts" here are applied to a particular person, role, or group, not to everyone. The approach examines the person's (or role's, or group's) intentions, dispositions, and motives and then makes a moral assessment or judgment of the person's (role's, group's) character.

People using the virtue/character approach often use the words "good" or "bad." They say, "She's a good CEO," or "He's a good physician," or, on the other hand, "She's not a very good mother," or "He's a bad leader." The judgment involved addresses neither the morality nor the consequences of an act but, rather, the character of the person performing the act.

"Integrity" and "walking the talk" are very important to people who use the virtue/character approach.

In our case, the Director of Clinical Services seemed to be expressing a virtue/character argument. He was not swayed by the CEO's principle argument that it is always wrong to alter a medical record. And although the Director of Clinical Services was receptive to the Director of Finance's consequence approach, he made character judgments of the patient's family ("vengeful") and lawyer ("greedy") and expressed his moral position in terms of what he saw as the hospital's obligation to the community.

Some clergy and mission services leaders seem to be virtue/character oriented in their decision making, as do many physicians ("I have to do what's best for my patient"). Everyone should probably use a virtue/character approach in making some moral decisions but if we use only this approach, people may try to manipulate us by playing on our fear of being thought irresponsible. But if we never use it, people may find it hard to understand who we are and what we stand for.

Moral Sentiment Approach

Nearly everyone experiences strong feelings when facing a difficult moral decision, but most people do not base their decisions on their feelings. People who do, however, have powerful feelings of approval or disapproval; what is vital to understand is that their moral judgment is the feeling itself.

People who use the moral sentiment approach say, for example, "I don't feel good about this," "This feels OK to me," "This just doesn't seem right," "Is everyone comfortable with this?" and "Can everybody live with this?"

But those who rely on their feelings in making moral judgments, often feel at a disadvantage when - at a management meeting, for example - difficult decisions must be made. Colleagues who use the principle or consequence approaches will likely insist that the moral sentiment person give objective reasons for his or her position. If the moral sentiment person then tries to couch the argument in the language of

principle, consequence, or virtue/character, it will - because it was based on feeling, not on those approaches - probably be weak.

In our case, the Deputy Director of Clinical Services relied on her feelings. She said she did not "feel right" lying about the medical record; covering up the incident "seemed wrong" to her.

Nurses, social workers, and chaplains often seem to take the moral sentiment approach to moral decision making, acting out of feelings arising from their interaction with patients. Because they do so, such people are sometimes accused of making their moral decisions subjectively, without the benefit of clear thinking. On the other hand, people who never seem to act out of moral sentiment often strike their colleagues as unfeeling.

Resolving Different Approaches

If the members of a group unknowingly adopt four different approaches to moral decision making, how can they arrive at a consensual decision? This is obviously an important question for any healthcare leadership team.

The team can do two things.

Recognize the Moral Approach Being Used
A principle argument will not be persuasive to a person who is most concerned about the consequences of following that principle. A virtue/character argument will not be persuasive to a person who just does not feel right about the proposed course of action.

Discuss the Issue within That Moral Approach
Faced with a principle-oriented member the team might introduce *other* applicable principles. And the team might suggest that a consequence-oriented member weigh *different* consequences; that a virtue/character oriented member consider *alternative* definitions of "professional responsibility"; and that a moral sentiment oriented member *experiment* with different options to determine whether he or she has a better feeling about any one of them.

In our case, the principle-oriented CEO could (instead of simply repeating that changing the medical record would be wrong) outline the possible repercussions of changing it and getting caught. In doing this, she might persuade the consequence-oriented Director of Financial Services to weigh the consequences differently. And then - if it were argued that the hospital's obligation to be truthful with the community was at least as great as its obligation to meet the community's healthcare needs - the virtue/character-oriented Director of Clinical Services might begin to agree with the CEO and the Director of Financial Services.

Once a leadership team has reached consensus on a difficult ethical issue, it should explain its decision (to its employees, board, community, or other relevant audience) with three supporting reasons: a principle reason, a consequence reason, and a virtue/character reason. (Because it is based on feelings, a moral sentiment reason will

be difficult to articulate.) The team can thus be sure that it has addressed most of its audience's moral concerns.

RACISM & REFUGEES

John Jegasothy, Minister at Rose Bay – Vaucluse UCA

It was just few months after our family arrived in Australia on humanitarian entrance from Sri Lanka. I went to the bank in Strathfield for transaction. I had to go pass a man who was blocking the way to join the queue (real queue!). I politely said "excuse me" and walked passed him. He started abusing me saying that I did not use the word 'please' and went on with his verbal abuse. I was embarrassed and humiliated in front of the people. What did I do wrong? In my language and culture if you say 'excuse me' or 'sit down' in a polite and kind way with a correct grammatical ending, that is enough. We do not have to say 'please.' I was confused but it was long after experiencing a few more rude behaviours and abrupt response from 'others' who were not like me, I realized it was racism in some form or another. I started to realize that it was more than 'polite language' but something to do with my skin colour.

Racism is a system of advantage and privilege based on 'race', in which one group exercise abusive power over others on the basis of skin colour and racial heritage. Often it begins with a subtle form of prejudice that could be shown to someone who is not like us, specifically from other cultural or language background. It is quite prevalent and no one could deny it. It is not confined specifically to white people against the coloured people but anyone acting in an unfriendly or hostile manner to another person from another culture and race with prejudice, xenophobia or even hatred which amounts to racism. It could be subtle to the extent of even passing humorous remarks or telling humorous stories to humiliate or denigrate the other.

Recently the Department of Immigration and citizenship (DIAC) gave me the opportunity to visit Christmas Island to see the Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers over 700 of them to offer them my pastoral support and advise specially after the clash late last year with the Afghanistan Asylum seekers. At the entrance of the North West section of the detention centre I had to present myself to the security officer, a white man. I was introduced to him by an Immigration Officer. I was quite polite and tried to be friendly, but to my dismay he was quite cold in the way he talked and gave instruction, not that he was not 'professional' but the tone, the non- verbal communication, avoiding eye contact showed that something was not right. With all the others who walked in and out he was happy, good-humoured and even exuberant, but with me he was stone cold.

He did this the next day too. By the time I left the detention centre that afternoon I had no doubt this man had a problem relating to people from other cultures with different colour and that he was racist in his approach. It was confirmed by one of the refugees who told me of the violent incident that caused concerns to the

Immigration, SERCO (the company who was running the detention centre) and the Afghan and the Tamil community in Australia. I found that the two communities have learnt to co-exist in their respective blocks, but not some officers.

It is believed that refugees have been facing racist treatment from the time they came into Australia either through proper channel from the UNHCR refugee camps or those who came by boats without proper travel documents like the Sri Lankans, Afghans, Iraqis and others.

Australia has signed the 1951 convention and the 1965 protocol but hasn't really come to terms with the fact that refugees could come with different practices and religion and need to be treated with respect and equality.   I also believe that although Australia has adopted a multicultural policy in 1973 when the new Labour Government came in and later declared itself a multicultural country in 1985 there is wide spread racism in the country, which should be addressed in deeper practical ways, not just holding "Harmony Day." As I said earlier, racism could be so subtle that even those who are in responsible positions and decision making bodies could fall into the trap.

In the detention centres in Australia it has been proven beyond doubt that refugees from other countries particularly from the Middle East and Asian nations have been treated with contempt. They were demonized as 'queue jumpers' and 'illegals' in the late 1990s and the early 2000. There had been several complaints from the detainees and the refugee action groups that I know of for the last 15 years that detainees from these countries and coloured background were treated harshly.

The Tampa Case in 2001 just before the general election was a typical example that Australia was not aware of the implications of being a signatory when they kept about 350 asylum seekers from the Middle East and passed the two laws, 'boarder protection' and 'Pacific Solution'. There was accusation that a child was thrown overboard, which was not substantiated later. The election was won by the ruling party, the asylum seekers demonized and the public confused and prejudice and xenophobia deepened. It was a human disaster, all could boil down to racism and fear of the 'other' politicized.

History seems to be getting repeated in the way the present government is responding to the boats that have been coming in numbers after the temporary protection visa was done away with. The fact remains that number of refugees coming by boat is negligible compared to those who come by plane and from countries like New Zealand and Britain. There seems to be over reaction to the Sri Lankans and the Afghans coming by boat. The opposition government has been taking the hard-line while according to the Sydney Morning Herald of the 10th May 2010 page 5 cites the letter released by the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions to the Prime Minister warning of a return to the politics of fear about asylum seekers that existed from 2001 to 2004.

The letter says," Political parties should not exploit fear and xenophobia through the dehumanisation of refugees....These attitudes have been building...culminating in the recent policy change by the... government to suspend the processing of all new asylum claims by Afghan and Sri Lankan nationals." This certainly supports my arguments.

I remember the time when two of the Sri Lankan boys got involved in a hunger strike in Villawood detention centre organized by the asylum seekers of Middle Eastern background who were kept in detention for a long period of time, some more than 2 years. Hunger strikes are peaceful ways of expressing the frustrations of the detainees and calling for attention as it is understood today. But on that day the officers running the detention centre dressed in fire masks kept banging on the door of the dormitory where the hunger strikers were all congregated till 2 AM to keep them awake and tired and suddenly broke open the door, handcuffed them all, put them in vans and took them to the airport and flew them to Woomera and Port Hedland.

Both detention centres were far away from their communities and direct legal assistance. Furthermore they were remote places, particularly Woomera, which became a controversial detention centre worse than Curtin and Baxter where there were several complaints of harsh and inhuman treatment ,which all boils down to racism. The question was asked by many whether the government will allow such treatment to be imposed on white people who might come as refugees from Zambia. It was pointed out by the detainees that there were New Zealanders and English who have overstayed in very high proportion but never had to go through such crude treatment.

Many refugee advocates like me and refugee activist raise their voices and brought this matter of harsh treatment to light which was then taken to parliament and a Senate committee was appointed to look into the complaints. Some of the organizations, churches and individuals including me worked towards getting the real stories to come out on paper which were passed on to the committee and parliamentarians, which eventually brought good results. Today if you go to Villawood you will find the detainees treated with respect and friendliness with the exception of a handful of officers.

The stranger, the unknown, could be a synonym to an 'enemy' like in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Samaritans were not Gentiles to the Jews but historically traitors and enemies. The Jew will not even borrow or buy anything from the Samaritan especially oil they produce. Jesus tells the story of this Samaritan who poured his oil on the wounds of the Jew who considered him an enemy and took every possible step to find lasting help and healing.

A stranger in the midst could bring about suspicion about him or her, the dress she wears, the food she eats, the language she talks and the way she brings up a child. It is the difference that causes the worry. What kind of people they are? They are not like us; they don't look like us, they don't speak like us; they don't eat our food.

There is a fear of the 'other' that they could take our jobs, their children could do better than us; they might multiply and increase their population. It could become real fear if people are not educated and helped to integrate in the community.

I was talking to a taxi driver 'Hassan' from Lebanon who lives in Perth in April on my way to Christmas Island. He is a chef by profession but drives as well. I got into a chat to find out how life was in Perth. He told me how lonely they feel as a family. He and his wife had their first baby only a few weeks back. The people who live in the block of flats are not friendly with them. In fact one of them is very rude and cruel to them. He said when they brought the newly born child home their few friends came to visit them. This man who happens to be a white man blocked the gate through which the cars could come in and park in their own car space and wanted to close the gate. He even rang the strata to complain who reprimanded the man for being unfair, and when it became violent went to courts where the judge dismissed the case that it was racially motivated. The family was exonerated but feel quite isolated and threatened, and asked why treat us this way when we just had our first baby.

'Hassan' also told me that it happened to his friend as well in another suburb. This man who lives down stairs of his friend and whenever visitors come and children start playing upstairs he would shout and reprimand them. I know of one of the refugee families I visit in Sydney had a similar problem recently where the neighbour to whom they have been kind but banged the door when the young refugee's children were playing in their flat and abused them. He scared the children and young mother as the father was at work.

I personally feel it is easy to be unkind, rude and impolite to someone who is a refugee or recent migrant. The people from the dominant culture think they have the power over their new neighbours. I have experienced it not just in the community but in the church as well. I will know for sure who has a racist problem and who has not. I could see it in their eyes, the way they look or ignore you or speak to you in a particular tone. I experience it on daily basis. People with prejudice find it easy to talk down on people like me who are brown ('black'), find fault or reprimand for the slightest thing. I know the people who are open, inclusive and treat me as equal, those who are truly liberated. I will know when I am comfortable, included and happy and when I am excluded, uncomfortable and rejected.

When I shared my experiences with a 'white minister' who was a very good friend and absolutely inclusive person he told me a touching story which really happened in Australia. The story goes on to say that my friend and a doctor from Hungary were sharing an accommodation in PNG for a period of time in the early 60s when this doctor had shared his experience in Australia with my friend. When the doctor came from Hungary he was asked to study for three years to repeat the course although he was a well qualified doctor from his country. One day when he was in a pensive mood in the time of a tutorial the young lecturer who was supervising approached him and wanted to know why he was doing his work. In replying this doctor had told

the lecturer that he was thinking about a book on the subject and named the same. The young lecturer told him that he knew the book which was written by a famous doctor. Quickly but calmly came the answer came from the doctor with a sigh, which surprised the young lecturer, "It is I who wrote the book." Well the doctor eventually took the option of working in PNG for 2 years to get his registration than waiting 3 years to finish the studies he certainly did not need.

For this reason of working towards a just society I have been involved with the running of the workshop for almost 10 years now developed by the Assembly Multicultural Ministry and the Board of mission NSW & ACT Synod, designed and run by Dr. Myong Duk Yang. The workshop is called 'Cross-Cultural Relations Workshop: Celebrating Diversity and Confronting Racism' and is basically adapted from the material, 'Bridges of Human Community' from the Lutheran Human relations Association of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

As in the manual for the Leaders I believe, 'in world of marked separation between people of different races and ethnicities it is important that we work to unmask racism and search for ways to overcome ignorance. The roots of racism go deep in Australia and have had a devastating impact on the lives of indigenous people. In Australia, racial prejudice combined with privilege and power has created a deadly mixture. For some racism permeates every aspect of their lives.'[1]

Racism is defined by HREOC (1998): "Racism is an ideology that gives expression to myths about other racial and ethnic groups that devalues and renders inferior those groups that reflects and is perpetuated by deeply tooted historical, social cultural and power inequalities in society."[2]

As for Christians, equality, justice and inclusiveness is rooted in our faith in God who created all people in his own image and in Jesus Christ whose love has no boundaries. I feel sorry for these people who act on prejudice and speak or do things with racist overtones especially when they are professed Christians.   The strangers could easily become their friends if only they are prepared to open their hearts and doors and compassionate and generous as God is. I firmly believe that those who are racially motivated have not understood the purpose of God's call to be his people or the call of Jesus to follow him.

In the Old Testament it is a basic teaching, "Do not mistreat alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt." Exodus 22:21. Leviticus 9: 15 admonishes, "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly."

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[1] Cross-Cultural Workshop: Celebrating Diversity and Confronting racism, Facilitators Manual, UCA Assembly & Board of Mission NSW & ACT Synod, 2001. P6

[2] Ibid. P7

Jesus lives out the love and generosity of God. He is the most inclusive person who ever lived on this earth, not just choosing ordinary, uneducated and 'outcaste' persons as his disciples; mixing up, visiting and eating with the people in the margins of the society even detested by the elites; but by dying on the cross like a criminal for the whole world. "God so loved the whole world....." (John 3:16). When the promised Holy Spirit was sent among the early church every one could hear the message of God through Peter in his or her own language. There was no discrimination on the basis of language or culture (Acts 2:1-12). Philip directed by the Spirit taught and baptized the Eunuch from Ethiopia and did not find him a Gentile (Acts 8:26-39). Peter learnt an important lesson in his mission when he was asked "Do not to call anything unclean that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). James in his book especially in chapter 2 challenges the church not to show favouritism of any form.

Jesus is all about a just, loving and inclusive community, and mission of the Church is to work towards a just society as a prototype of the kingdom of God. It is our responsibility to build an integrated community, celebrating the differences and make the vision of this country come true, 'Australia Fair.' It is written down for us in no uncertain terms. There is nothing outside the circle of God's love. Paul writes with certainty, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). "People will come east and west, from north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). "After this I looked and there before me was great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb" (Revelations 7:9). Significantly these are the people who have come from great tribulation whose every tear will be wiped away from the eyes (Revelation 7:14, 17).

Abba Anthony said, "Our life and our death are with our neighbour. If we gain our neighbour, then we have gained God; but if we scandalize our neighbour, then we have sinned against Christ." Abba Apollo said, "When you see your neighbour, you have seen the Lord your God.   John says it all, 'A new commandment I give you; love one another as I have loved you. .....by this all men will know that you are my disciple" (John 13:34, 35). In the epistle he reiterates, "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:19).

There is no place for racism in the kingdom of God, and in a truly multicultural country where 51 conventions have been signed there should be an equal place for refugees treated with generosity, compassion and respect as fellow human beings.

Ethical Responsibility and the Environment
David Reichardt, Presbytery minister
Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery

Down the other end of the table during mothers' day lunch a huge discussion erupted about the trial of teaching Ethics classes as an alternative to Special

Religious Education in schools. Will the teaching of ethics be a threat to the hallowed place of SRE? Will it, on the other hand, stimulate Christians to think about the relationship between our faith and how we behave? Will it even get us to teach Scripture in livelier, more attractive and relevant ways? Or will ethics classes prove so boring that they make Scripture look good by comparison?

It's probably a good idea to have a decent grasp of what ethics is before proceeding too far in this discussion. Embroiled with two very sharp young nephews down the other end of the table in an equally vigorous debate on evolution and faith, Richard Dawkins and his increasing number of challengers, I was hearing more passion than lucidity from afar. The lack of definition may also have been because Ethics is a slippery concept. But here's Wikipedia's go at it:

> "Ethics (also known as moral philosophy) is a branch of philosophy that addresses questions about morality —that is, concepts such as good and bad, noble and ignoble, right and wrong, justice and virtue."[3]

Yes, yes, I know, Wikipedia's a bit of a fudge, so I'll try my MacBook's dictionary:

> Ethics is: "moral principles that govern a person's or group's behaviour; the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles."[4]

My task is to think about the new, applied field of environmental ethics. But to do this I need some overview of the huge span of ethical thinking, and at this point the dictionary provides helpful distinctions. There are, roughly speaking, **three schools of ethics** in Western philosophy: the Aristotelean, the Kantian and the Utilitarian. I'll consider these briefly before approaching my task, because they help us start to think Christianly about something that, as staunch defenders of SRE worry, isn't necessarily Christian.

1. The Greek philosopher **Aristotle** held that the virtues, such as justice, charity and generosity, are "dispositions to act in ways that benefit both the person possessing them and that person's society."[5]

For Aristotle, to live according to the virtues was to live ethically. Interestingly, no less a theologian than N.T. Wright has advocated a return, at least in some measure, to this way of living ethically in *Virtue Reborn.*[6] Since he opposes the Platonic "heavenism" so prevalent in much of western Christianity it is perhaps not surprising that he has sided with the great Plato's star student but later opponent. So has Wright's countrywoman, ecotheologian Celia Deane-Drummond. In something of a textbook of ecotheological ethics, *The Ethics of*

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[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics
[4] New Oxford American Dictionary Version 2.1.2 (80.3) Copyright © 2005-2009 Apple Inc. All rights reserved
[5] *Ibid*
[6] Wright, N.T. *Virtue Reborn* London: SPCK; 2010

Nature, Deane-Drummond advocated "the recovery of Virtue for an Ethics of Nature".[7]

2. The eighteenth century German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** made the concept of duty central to morality. As one of the Enlightenment's heavy philosophical lifters Kant argued that humans are bound, from a knowledge of their duty as rational beings, to obey the categorical imperative to respect other rational beings.

This approach to ethics was particularly evident in the way that Governor Arthur Phillip and others of the English ruling class in Sydney's infancy related to indigenous people. Amongst the ruling class there was a benevolent assumption that they knew best in respect of the convicts and those in lower classes, the land and the Aborigines. For them religion was an instrument that aided good government. The Enlightenment credo that human reason and common sense determined right and wrong ruled in the colony. Although they helped to build a peaceful, prosperous society these attitudes were more in line with the ideals of the Enlightenment than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is little doubt that the Established Churches of England and Scotland had to a considerable degree become tools of the Enlightenment and the English ruling class.[8] In particular, the Churches were implicated in maintaining order in the colony, and were complicit in a system that was brutal, reflecting the severity of the criminal justice system and the undeclared class war that raged in England at the time.[9] Opponents of the ethics trial are perhaps motivated by fear of a return to a similarly humanistic approach to ethics.

3. In recent times duty, reason and common sense have been supplanted by another humanistic basis for ethics: **Utilitarianism**. Utilitarianism argues that the guiding principle of conduct should be the greatest happiness or benefit to the greatest number of people.

Christians have questions to ask of each of these approaches to ethics. (That's why I'm happy for an ethics trial to go ahead in our schools. Let the discussion proceed!) The basic question is, in the absence of an external reference point, aka God, how does society determine a basis for ethics? How do we determine that there anything intrinsically virtuous about virtues; or that reason is reasonable, common sense is sensible and that duty is dutiful? How do we measure the greatest pleasure or good for the greatest number of people?

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[7] Deane-Drummond, C. E. *The Ethics of Nature* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; 2004   p.1
[8] Alister E. McGrath, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature: Science, Religion and the Human Sense of Wonder*, 1 ed., 1 vols. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002). Although he did not address the Australian situation Alister McGrath's thesis in this book is that the Enlightenment, not Christianity, is the chief environmental culprit. My question to McGrath is to what extent did the Enlightenment emerge from western Christianity?
[9] Hughes, Robert *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868.* Samuel Marsden, "the whipping parson", was notorious for this dual role.

At this point the eco-ethicist enters the discussion. Who says that ethics is determined only by what is good for humans? Environmental philosophers have long noted that consideration for nature, non-human creation, is notable by its absence in discussions about ethics. Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including law, sociology, theology, economics, ecology and geography.

The academic field of environmental ethics developed in response to the work of scientists such as Rachel Carson[10] and events such as the first Earth Day in 1970, when environmentalists started urging philosophers to consider the philosophical aspects of environmental problems. Two papers published in Science had a crucial impact: Lynn White's *"The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis"*[11] and Garrett Hardin's *"The Tragedy of the Commons"*.[12] Also influential was Hardin's later essay called *"Exploring New Ethics for Survival"*,[13] as well as an essay by Aldo Leopold called "The Land Ethic," in which Leopold explicitly claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis were philosophical.[14] The first international academic journals in this field emerged from North America in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the US-based journal *Environmental Ethics* in 1979 and the Canadian based journal *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* in 1983. The first British based journal of this kind, *Environmental Values*, was launched in 1992.

There are many ethical decisions that human beings make with respect to the environment.

> Should we continue to clear fell forests for the sake of human consumption?
> Should we continue to propagate?
> Should we continue to make petrol-powered vehicles?
> What environmental obligations do we need to keep for future generations?
> Is it right for humans to knowingly cause the extinction of a species for the convenience of humanity?
> And, to generalize from what we commonly understand by the environment, can one speak of "animal ethics"? (Well yes, the Australian philosopher Peter Singer has certainly done so to great effect.)
> Is there a place for ethical considerations in biotechnology? Does ethics have something to say in the debate about cloning? (Yes, and yes.)

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[10] Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1962

[11] White, Lynn. *"The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."* Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203 - 07

[12] Hardin, Garrett. *"The Tragedy of the Commons."* Science 162 no. 3859 (1968): 1243-48.

[13] Hardin, Garrett, *Exploring new ethics for survival: the voyage of the spaceship Beagle* Viking Press, 1972

[14] Leopold, Aldo (1949). *"The Land Ethic"*. *A Sand County Almanac* Oxford University Press, 1949

Does being a Christian make any difference to the way in which one approaches these eco-ethical questions? Again the answer is yes, it does. Fundamentally, Christian belief in a trinitarian God who was revealed in Christ and is with us in the Spirit provides the external reference point missing from the schools of ethics I have described. God is the basis of Christian approaches to ethics, including environmental ethics. To specify just a little I would suggest that Jesus' Great Commandments, to love God with everything we have, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves provide a basis for a Christian approach to ethics. If, then, we understand and treat *nature as our neighbour* we have a basis for responsible, environmental ethics.

In our Uniting Church context *UnitingJustice* and *UnitingCare* are doing important work, developing more detailed approaches to responsible environmental ethics. *UnitingJustice* promotes sustainable living to governments, and has produced and made available, in hard copy and on the Assembly website, a number of resources. Rather than develop in more detail my own approach, which would take a number of pages, and which I will gladly do face-to-face, in small groups, seminars and in worship settings, I shall conclude by pointing you to this good work and add to it a select bibliography.

- *An Economy of Life: Re-imagining human progress for a flourishing world* Twelfth Assembly, 2009

- *For the Sake of the Planet and All Its People: a Uniting Church statement on climate change* Assembly Standing Committee, 2006

- *Tuvalu and the Impact of Global Warming* Tenth Assembly, 2003

- *Alternative Energy Sources* Assembly Standing Committee, 2000

- *Nuclear Fuel Cycle Policy* Assembly Standing Committee, 2000

- *The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations* Sixth Assembly, 1991

I invite you to pray and think deeply, and to act responsibly in this vitally important area of environmental ethics so that we can swiftly move towards living sustainably.

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A Reflection on Ethical Education
- A Possible Christian Response to Educating our Children
Geoff Stevenson, Minister at Northmead

Introduction

Earlier this year the Federal Government released the 'My School' website amidst considerable controversy from many schools – teachers, parents and even students. It is intended to enable parents to glean more comprehensive information about local schools and so inform their choice regarding enrolment of their children. Whilst the website enables comparison with similar schools based on statistical analysis, these schools range across Australia. Comparison is not only confusing but actually limited to a few factors based around literacy and numeracy derived from the common national testing known as NAPLAN. Whilst this information can be helpful in tracking student progress it hardly provides parents with a full and detailed picture of the education their children will receive at a particular school. Whilst most schools teach the syllabus and allow the testing to stand alone, some schools are known to be preparing students for these tests so that the results they receive look particularly good against comparisons with other schools.

I recently went into one of the local shops that specialises in educational books, study guides and so on. My daughter needed a particular book for one of her courses. I was quite surprised to be confronted by a vast range of books to prepare students for these NAPLAN tests. Why do students need to study for these diagnostic tests at home? There were also several books to prepare students for Selective Schools testing. There is considerable hype, anxiety and impetuous decision-making amongst many parents surrounding their children's education.

Much discussion on the 'My School' website has suggested that it provides a tool for parents to use against schools and to be able to demand better performances from schools and particular teachers.[15] There are definitely teachers whose performance is below expectations – this is the case in every profession and workplace. I wonder, though, whether parents understand that student performance is also related to what goes on within the home. When children bring particular issues to school these can

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[15] For example the January 29, 2010, Sydney Morning Herald article 'My School criticism fails the test': http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/my-school-criticism-fails-test-20100128-n1rm.html

impact on their ability to learn. When children miss breakfast or don't have lunch provided, they have diminished ability to concentrate. Children who are allowed to stay up late on computers or watching television are tired at school; they are often irritable and difficult. Children who have particular family crises and other issues bring their anxiety to school and this anxiety can have pronounced effects within the classroom, impacting on the potential for these and other students to learn.

There seems to be a compartmentalisation of life responsibilities such that we export our children's learning to the school and dump all of our expectations upon the professionals there. Family responsibility for children's education seems to diminish as children get older but the expectations in terms of results seems to grow exponentially. Those parents who can afford other options pay various levels of funding to have their children's education 'guaranteed' – at least as far as any school can 'guarantee' results.

Perhaps one of the drivers of tools such as 'My School' website or league tables is the enormous range of choice that confronts parents of high school aged children. I well remember when my daughter was in year 5 at primary school. I had been warned that there would be a growing intensity amongst many parents regarding where to send their children for high school. It surprised me. When I went to high school there was the local Catholic School or the local state school and that was it. We went to the state school for which we were in-area and that's all there was to it. One Year 6 of about 70-80 children at the local primary school dispersed students to 21 different high schools! The choice is staggering and the intensity, pressure and hysteria can be unbelievable.

Parents can become very obsessive about their children's education in ways that create a frantic search for the best school possible – whatever that means?! Stories and gossip abound. People make choices that seem surprising – for example, the least religious people suddenly send children to youth groups to ensure the possibility of getting into a private church school.

Several conversations have led me to think more about the ethics of education and how Christians might respond to the plethora of choices and the particular needs and issues surrounding many schools. I suppose an interesting question to ponder might be where Jesus would be found within the education system and how he might respond to the various forms of education in our society. Let me then begin with a brief survey of education in NSW.

Brief History of Education in NSW...[16]
In the early convict settlement of NSW, education was primarily offered through the Anglican Church, the 'official church' of the colony. This was partly based on the system in England, except that voluntary church resources weren't sufficient in the early colony to provide all education. Therefore, state grants to the church provided for the education of the colony. The state grants included significant land grants and

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[16] Information on the history of education in NSW was derived from the Centre For Learning Innovation Website:

http://www.governmentschools.det.nsw.edu.au/cli/govt_schools/history/early.shtm

state support for the church. Inevitably, the other religious traditions, Catholic and Protestant, challenged this religious and educational monopoly of the Anglican Church. In the 1830's Governor Burke considered providing resources to the various religious traditions to provide education. He soon realised that this would lead to 3-4 schools in each community, no matter how small they were. Such policy would be socially divisive and extremely wasteful of resources. He opted to pursue a system along the lines of the Irish National System, where all children attended common schools and received an elementary education. There were strong protests, especially from the Protestant section (particularly the strong Anglican clergy) on a number of grounds, but especially because of the acceptance of the Catholic Church into the process. The system was put aside and the government provided a pound for pound subsidy to the churches for the provision of education.

Governor Gipps, in the late 1830's, pursued Governor Burke's original proposal but recognised that the protests were largely focussed around the inclusion of Catholics and Protestants in the same scheme. He developed a two tier system: a common school system for Protestant children and a continued subsidy for the Catholic schools system. This was initially rejected by the powerful Anglican lobby, who opposed the lack of teaching of specific Anglican doctrine. Through the 1840's there were a number of factors that led to the weakening of the denominational system and more than half of the colony's children were not attending school. The churches were finding it difficult to fund the rapidly increasing need for education in the growing colony. The recession of the 1840's further weakened their position.
In 1848 a common system was finally established, with the compromise that funding to existing church schools would remain – both Catholic and Protestant. The intent of the state system was to provide education to children who didn't have access. Local communities contributed to the costs of the schools, especially through providing part of the teacher's salary. It seems that there was continued competition between religious schools and the common school system, with denominational schools often being established in opposition to a government school.

We currently have at least 3 competitive forces within the education system.
1. The largest is the state system or public education, which is essentially funded by the state. There are at least 2 'sub-levels' within this system – selective and non-selective schools.
2. There is a large Catholic system also with various levels from the local diocesan schools to the 'GPS' schools with very high fees.
3. The Independent Schools Association that consists of various religious schools and schools with alternate educational methodologies or ideologies. This system comprises low fee through to very high fee schools.

Both the Catholic and Independent Schools are essentially oriented towards a particular religious ethos or educational ideology. I confess it is difficult for me to understand the need for separation of Catholic schools from the rest. All state schools uphold and teach a range of important values, such as integrity, respect, co-operation, care, democracy, excellence, responsibility, participation and fairness.[17]

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[17] Since 2004, these particular values have been emphasised in all state schools. Information for parents is contained in a website so that these values may be reflected and developed within the home as well. https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/newsroom/yr2006/oct/newvalues.htm

Ethics in Education…
The education system has been subject to various levels of 'ethical' debate since its inception. As with the current debate in NSW over the trial of ethics classes and how this might compete with or even replace special religious education in schools, ethical considerations are never neutral. We all bring various perspectives and experiences, biases and prejudices, ideologies and faith positions to any discussion on education.

As we consider, from a Christian perspective, an ethical approach to education, I propose that the essential values we endorse are those espoused by Jesus (but also found in various other religious traditions and philosophies). The heart of Jesus' proclamation of the Realm of God is justice and love. Jesus encourages compassion, mercy, justice, community, peace, love and equality amongst people – a recognition that we are all different and unique but equally valued by God and we all have a contribution to make to our society and the world in which we live. I point out that the NSW government's Values in Education list (above) overlaps significantly with what Jesus proclaims and the particular values that Christians seek to uphold. Whilst we might like to develop other areas of life such as spirituality and prayer, service and ministry, our public expression of Christian faith will necessarily contain these values.

In the light of my own personal experience, I would like to explore some of the realities of the education system in terms of justice, compassion and the ministry of those who follow Jesus' way.

Early School Education – A Community that Nurtures
When confronted with the various options for educating our children we, like most parents, enrolled our children at the local public school and were satisfied with that experience across the range of learning and growth experiences they had. The local primary school serves an important and valuable role of connecting people with each other through the common experience of having school-aged children. Whilst many people have good social networks, there are always some people who for various reasons do not have such support networks. School can be an avenue for these networks to develop as people become acquainted with other parents of their children's friends. It is interesting to observe how parents continue to drop their primary aged children off at school and hang around to talk to other parents, often long after the classes have gone in. This sense of connection is very important and the developing sense of community that can emerge is invaluable to many people who don't have other social networks available. I suspect that Jesus would have been involved in these places to support, encourage and nurture those who needed friendship and other support. It is a wonderful place for followers of Jesus to reach out and meet human need in practical and significant ways.

I also recognised very early that schools are not self-contained systems with all of the resources necessary to educate our children for life. There are many elements to education that must come from elsewhere and infants and primary schools depend greatly on parental (and other adult) assistance in reading and other programs. Our local school had many readily available and willing parents and grandparents who had good literacy and other skills to assist classroom teachers. What happens, though, in schools where there is a higher level of illiteracy amongst the parent body, or where the parents do not have patterns or models of volunteering in the community? Not

every community has accessible and capable parents to offer appropriate support within their local school. Often the most needy schools have the least resources to call upon. Churches have an excellent opportunity to work alongside the school in various ways to support the education of children, be mentors in their lives and serve the local community. This is a response of justice to a situation where children are deprived of the kinds of resources, support and nurture that other children may have ready access to. My experience has been that the local primary school highly values the presence of the church within the school, providing we are there to serve the needs of the children and support the staff and not for our own ulterior motives. It takes time to build up trust but through offering gentle support and care and being available, we are accepted as being able to contribute in various ways to the school. When parents from the church are willing to serve on groups such as the Parents and Citizens Association, faith can be experienced as active service – it is an opportunity to serve the community in a valuable and important manner.

High School – Parents and the Community Opting Out
When children reach the stage where we need to consider high school, the interesting struggles begin. Whilst the state school system may be trusted to provide adequate education for our children in the early years, the plethora of other options raises questions and concerns that may be real or not for education through the teenage years. Perhaps it is the age and life phase our children reach at the end of primary school that causes significant concern for parents? Perhaps it is the recognition that high school is the business end of education and the real learning will begin now? Suddenly anxiety levels rise and frantic searching commences for many families. Issues that may have been important previously are discarded in the light of 'wanting the very best for our children' – whatever that means. Suddenly private schools become more desirable and attractive. For others the possibility of an academically selective high school becomes their driving goal – if not that of their child. I have heard stories of children having tutoring for their tutoring to get them into the best selective school in the hope of… Well I'm not sure what the hope is? What is it we really want or expect from and for our children? We want the best, but what really 'is the best'? Is academic rigor and success the goal or do we want something else as well? Do we want children to receive an education that gives them the highest grades in the HSC but little else, except stress? Or, do we want children to have a rounded experience of the diversity of life, encountering the tough issues and being subjected to tough questions in a supportive environment?

Some parents have clearly suggested to me that they desire a very safe and secure environment for their children in high school. They want an experience where there is not too much interference from difficult students who bring other issues or peer pressure – they want 'values and discipline'. If they have appropriate resources they are able to choose a school where their children can have particular religious values reinforced in a secure environment and where discipline is guaranteed because the school can reject any students who appear to be unacceptable – at any time!
I wonder, in the light of the values that Jesus proclaimed, whether he would countenance such options for his followers? There seems to be an issue of justice. Only those who can actually afford the fees, whether 'high' or 'low', are able to choose this option. Only those whose family and personal background is suitable in terms of academic level and learning capacity, emotional health and so on, are acceptable. Students from dysfunctional families, for example, where there are

learning and/or behavioural issues are usually dismissed as not suitable. Such schools have the possibility of selecting only those students they really want and therefore reject those they do not want. It would seem that this is actually counter to the very values of Jesus and the faith he inspired. Jesus went amongst those who were difficult and for whom life was a struggle. He befriended people who were difficult and offered grace and love. If religious schools reflected these values in their mission strategy, the church may well be at the forefront of education and community service in Jesus' name. Centres such as the Exodus Foundation's Literacy Tutorial Centres, that work with students who are illiterate and bring them back to mainstream education through intensive support, and Exodus Youth that works with homeless youth to provide an education and future, are prime examples.[18]

It seems that many people have too little time to contribute to other things beyond work and maintaining their home or social life. They are tired, stressed and can't or won't contribute. Others are stretched by their involvement in a variety of other activities including sport. Perhaps it becomes easier just to pay higher up front fees and have the responsibility for education left with others. Other families simply want to have greater control over their children's education and to be able to select exactly the kinds of 'values' or ideologies that their children experience, but with minimal personal involvement. Whether, their children are at state schools or private schools, parents have various reasons, some good and some poor, for not being involved in their children's educational experience. Nevertheless, children need much more than schools that are able to provide in order for them to grow and mature as well rounded young people who are responsibly able to take their place within society. For many parents there is an intense and frantic period of decision-making regarding where their children will be educated. This is followed by a withdrawal of responsibility and involvement – unless the child receives a bad report. The parents will become instantly involved, either accusing the school or threatening the student – neither a satisfactory response!

In the second tier of public education, the selective high school, the basic reasoning is that higher order achievers ought to be brought together to challenge and stimulate each other and so progress at their own rate without interference from more difficult students. There is also the suggestion that those in the comprehensive high school will all be at a similar level without having to cater for the higher achievers. Again, the reality is that the best students are creamed off and those who are left are a diverse group of students who range from high achievers to those who struggle with learning and behavioural issues that can make them very difficult students. The local comprehensive high school has the broadest group and receives no extra funding to account for the higher needs present in many of these schools. They do not have the numbers of high achieving students to push other students to work to higher levels. At the same time, selective schools are also an artificial reflection of society as they don't embrace the diversity of people found in wider society. In Jesus ministry and teaching, he embraced the ideals of community and rejected forms of exclusion; even those entrenched in his own religious traditions of Judaism. It would seem to me that

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[18] The Exodus Foundation is part of Ashfield Uniting Church Parish Mission. Its head is Rev Bill Crews. These centres provide education for students who are illiterate, homeless, or failing life in a variety of ways. See http://www.billcrews.com.au/htm/exodus.htm?our_services/education

high achievers and naturally talented students, academically, have a responsibility to use their talents to help other students reach higher levels.

I remember my wife and I being pleasantly surprised at a parent-teacher interview for our son in year 3. His teacher indicated that he was doing well with his work and was near the top of the class – he is one to whom school work comes more easily. The teacher then went on, hesitantly at first, to explain how he believed that our son therefore had a responsibility to his class mates to help them, rather than take for granted his own skill. This teacher didn't want those students near the top of the class to feel superior because they had some natural talent in a particular area. He saw it as a responsibility and asked if we were happy for our son to be seated next to one of the children who struggled most and for him to assist this child with their work. We thought that this was a wonderful idea and exactly the kind of thing that Jesus advocated and did!

The Church and Education for Life
It seems to me that the local comprehensive high school is one place where the local church might have a significant impact if they would send their children there and offer their support within the school. It is here that we meet the greatest cross-section of society. There are people of various religious beliefs or no religious belief. There is a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, cultural and ethnic diversity, family models and experiences, along with students who have learning and behavioural issues. These schools, in general, have the greatest diversity and present the greatest need. It is precisely here that many Christian families defect from the state system and seek the private schools for the security and religious nurture they provide. It is precisely here that Christian families could make their most significant impact by working together with their local school to redress the injustices, touch human need and support the nurture of our children and young people.

I am inspired by the stories of Jesus leaving the religious places and venturing amongst the throngs of people who were poor, alienated, lacking hope, seeking direction and struggling with the diversity of human need. He went amongst ordinary people who felt, for a variety of reasons, excluded from the religious life of Israel, and shared life and hope. It was amongst these seemingly 'non-religious' people that the most faithful followers were found. I wonder how things might change if people from local churches banded together and ventured down to the local school and offered themselves in support of that school? Some might mentor young people and provide a stable influence in their lives. Some might offer skills in carpentry or art, music, drama, gardening, leadership, fundraising, technology… When adults who are stable, self-aware, mature and have the capacity to be loving and caring come alongside young people they can make a difference to their lives. Instead of paying for our children to be nurtured, perhaps we might give ourselves and our time to nurture ours and other's children as they grow through the difficult teenage years. There are many learning experiences beyond the purely academic to be had and schools with broad diversity offer enormous challenges and possibilities.

Conclusion
It takes more than a teacher, more than a school, to educate our children. It takes a range of people who can offer influence, support, love, an example, information and stimulation. Education is more than knowledge or gaining academic qualifications. It

is growing in wisdom that will sustain us through life and help us to live justly within this world. Education is an all round experience that forms a young person into a healthy adult who is a responsible citizen of planet earth. The experiences we gain of other people who represent facets of life that are different from our own, who bring different perspectives, ideologies and life experiences help us grow in wisdom, compassion and justice. Such experiences, alone, do not guarantee learning or growth. They need mature and wise adults to help guide and direct young people on this journey through life and help them to reflect on these experiences.

As our society becomes more individualistic and preoccupied with material values, it becomes more narcissistic and concerned with only those things that affect 'me'. Our children are impacted by such self-preoccupation with fewer experiences of adult mentoring and guidance. Our attempts to isolate our children and oversubscribe to their safety, diminishes their ability to encounter the world with confidence and resilience. They need to be exposed to things that are potentially dangerous or harmful or that challenge them, but within a secure environment where they are able to consider consequences and develop skills to resist. I have heard too many anecdotal stories of young people from overly protected environments having great difficulty negotiating a wider world of freedom after they leave a very protective school environment. They have not had the opportunity to engage with significant social issues in an environment where they have adult support and can talk through the broader issues, see the impact of various choices and learn to make appropriate decisions.

In all of this the local Christian church has an enormous potential to support the local school and play an active role in nurturing, mentoring and helping young people to have the opportunity to grow in a whole and healthy manner with the necessary wisdom to encounter and grow through life's experiences. In this time when there is a lower adult involvement in the lives of many children, the church can be part of the 'village' that it takes to educate a child.

Some Resources for Ministry

Important Resources - a list of significant books and helpful websites developed by the Doctrine and Worship working groups. It is on the Assembly Doctrine website.

Peacemaking and Discipleship study book and DVD – this is a 6 part Bible study with comments from a range of people across the UCA on the DVD. These are available from MediaCom.

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