

Live Life to the Full: Safe and Inclusive Learning Communities – Briefing Paper

The following material is designed to provide background to the *Live Life to the Full: Safe and Inclusive Learning Communities Statement and Resources*, which EREA has recently developed. In the interests of simplicity, this response has been structured as key statements followed by dot points.

The *Live Life to the Full* documents were developed in response to the needs of the students in our schools.

- The documents aim to provide a faithful Catholic contribution to an area of student well-being that has emerged as an area of need. EREA feels that it is no longer sufficient to merely critique secular contributions to this area without offering an approach which might contribute to the holistic care of our students and staff.
- The various research reports into the mental health of young people in Australian schools highlight homophobic and transphobic bullying as having a significant impact on some students who may or may not be same-sex attracted or gender diverse. Anecdotal evidence from our schools supports the results of this research.

The *Live Life to the Full* documents provide our school leaders with guidance in ensuring that all students are safe from homophobic and transphobic bullying. They are designed to be one source of guidance to inform the pastoral practices of the schools.

- As talented leaders and committed Catholics, our Principals source a range of professional support and guidance as to how they pastorally respond to complex issues, such as *Towards Wholeness* from NSW. Our documents will not be the sole guide for our schools' pastoral practice in the area.
- The work that EREA has undertaken is not an attempt to enter into the domain of sexual morality or present a comprehensive account of Church teaching on these issues. Other Church sources available to our schools will do this. We have entered this work through a lens of pastoral care, safety and the Gospel imperative of inclusion. It is an attempt to respond to the reality of the young people entrusted to us for education and reflect the compassionate and inclusive face of Christ to all.

The *Live Life to the Full* documents are not and were never intended to be a "Catholic Safe Schools" program or curriculum.

- The documents do not constitute a 'program', they are not curriculum material. The curriculum taught in our schools on human sexuality, relationships and morality comes from the local diocesan religious education programs.
- We are also aware that Catholic Education in Queensland and Victoria are doing work in this area and, when completed, we will be recommending those materials to our schools. Catholic

Education South Australia has already developed a whole-school approach that aligns with this work through the *Made In The Image of God Project*.

- The EREA documents do use some similar terminology to the 'Safe Schools Coalition', but this does not mean they follow the same agenda. There was no reliance on 'Safe Schools Coalition' materials in the formulation of EREA's work. The documents do refer to relevant demographic research from secular sources, which show that same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people are a major focus of bullying, but they also explicitly refer to Catholic teaching and explicitly follow Catholic teaching.



The *Live Life to the Full* documents are an initiative emanating from one aspect of our Inclusive Community Touchstone

- One of the ways Christ revealed the truth of human life and salvation was by including all, especially the poor. Pope Francis has a section on 'Inclusion of the Poor' in *Evangelii Gaudium*, seeing inclusion as one of 'two great issues ... that ... will shape the future of humanity'. In his homilies he states, 'Jesus' attitude is to include' and 'The Eucharist ... is a school of inclusion'. There are many other instances where the Pope speaks of Jesus as a model for inclusion. Being guided by Catholic Social Teaching, the concepts of Human Dignity and Right Relationships are at the core of this work.
- Other statements through which EREA has embedded the Inclusive Community Touchstone are the *EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*, the *EREA Affordability Statement* (Guidelines on addressing the affordability of our schools), the *EREA Relationships Statement* (guiding our interaction with Church and other partners) and the *EREA Justice and Peace Framework* (Heads, Hands, Hearts and Feet). Our *Youth + Purpose Statement* outlines the philosophy upon which EREA conducts 19 Youth Plus Flexible Learning Centres nationally, focusing on ensuring disenfranchised youth in our Australian community have access to appropriate education.

Our *Live Life to the Full* documents are not intended to question, challenge or undermine the Church's teaching on human sexuality.

- EREA respects the authority and duty of the Australian Bishops to guide the way in which all Catholic schools undertake their mission in the Church.
- The curriculum taught in our schools on human sexuality, relationships and morality occurs within framework of local diocesan religious education programs. EREA does not intend to develop curriculum in this area.
- The documents are clearly concerned with the prevention of bullying, which is to support the human flourishing of students. They are clearly concerned with inclusion, again to support the human flourishing of students, staff and families. They explicitly endorse Church teaching that 'every person has a fundamental identity: a creature of God, and by grace, His child and heir to eternal life'. We strongly feel that these steps witness to the way and teaching of Jesus and enhance, rather than undermine Christian faith.

The Leadership Team of each EREA School is invited to reflect on the *Live Life to the Full* documents and make decisions on how these may better inform pastoral frameworks and decisions in relation to individual students:

- Given the diversity of schools in the EREA network, and the fact that *Live Life to the Full* is not a curriculum, it is not appropriate for EREA to suggest a model of implementation. It is for the

leadership of each school to discern the most appropriate use of these resources. EREA National office is in the process of providing support to ensure that school leaders understand the statements and are guided by recommendations included within the documents.

- Since the launch of the documents, EREA has supported schools who have sought further clarification and guidance on the purpose and use of *Live Life to the Full* and *Safe and Inclusive Communities*. Based on the purpose that the documents are designed to assist school leaders in enhancing their pastoral response to matters of homophobic and transphobic bullying, EREA has, on request, further briefed Principals and College Leadership Teams on the purpose of the documents.
- In 2018, it is intended that further briefings will take place at the Regional Level with nominated Leadership Team members and EREA Regional Directors. Appropriate sections of this response would be included in such briefings.

We have been heartened by the positive responses of many to the *Live Life to the Full* documents.

- Our school Principals, as well as many other members of staff have welcomed the materials. These documents have generated the most correspondence from school staff to me as Executive Director than any other area in our 10 year history.
- Supportive correspondence has also been received from other Religious Institute school systems who have used our material to further their own work in this space; such as Dominican schools. A range of clergy and members of the Catholic community have also sent us words of encouragement.
- While there has been some criticism of the documents from a political lobby group, the Australian Christian Lobby, and a group of former students, the vast majority of correspondence on this issue has been in support of our work in this area.
- EREA has appreciated the proactive responses by a number of Australian bishops, who have sought further information, explanation and clarification in relation to our intent and plans.
- Further suggestion: We also appreciate your referral of letters and critiques of the *Live Life to the Full* documents to EREA. In the case of recent letters by an anonymous group (excepting the emailer) – firstly to EREA and then to all Australian Bishops - it has been difficult to determine the type of response that is appropriate, given the writers are not identified and their approach is not transparent. Your response to this has assisted us in further clarifying our purpose.

Aside from additional briefings to School Leadership Teams in 2018, EREA does not intend to do any further work in this area unless, after further dialogue, we are invited to by our Bishops.

Any queries regarding this work can be directed to Jo Hart via jo.hart@erea.edu.au or 03 9426 3214.

