

## ATTACHMENT O

### LETTER TO ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY ON SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS FOR RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST

21 July, 2016

Mr Douglas Mawhinney,  
Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine,  
Archdiocese of Sydney,  
P.O. Sydney South NSW 1235,

Dear Mr Mawhinney,

I write to draw your attention to some problems uncovered by members of the *New Perspectives for Catholic Education Group* (NPFCE Group) in the Sacramental Programs for Reconciliation and Eucharist currently in use in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

NPFCE was formed last year to investigate the extent to which existing religious education is responsible for the lack of success of our schools to produce practising Catholics. Members of our group met with Mr Anthony Cleary late last year and he provided us with copies of some of the text books titled *To Know Worship and Love*. Since then we have been looking at the content of all of these text books which, we understand, are used in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. We have been informed by Archdiocese staff that Catechists use the *To Know Worship and Love* textbooks as reference books for their teaching of religious education in state primary and secondary schools. We have not seen the materials used to instruct students in state schools.

As part of the above, the group also looked at the content of the Archdiocese Sacramental program for Reconciliation and Eucharist and discovered that neither program teaches children some of the essential fundamentals about these sacraments before they receive them for the first time. Students are also not given sufficient training about these two sacraments in their later schooling in that they are not told about mortal and venial sins and about the need to be in a "state of grace" before they make their first Holy Communion. As a result they are not provided with the link between the two sacraments and, therefore, fail to see the need for regular confession.

In Catholic schools, students are told of mortal sins in year 5 and they are mentioned again briefly a number of times in high school. However, they are given little emphasis. Students are not taught how to decide which sins are grave enough to be mortal and have to be confessed. Furthermore, they are not given instruction on the need to be in a "state of grace" other than a vague mention of this requirement in the year 11 & 12 text book.

All of this is surprising given that Holy Communion is the centre of our faith and we must be in the "state of grace" to receive it. I am sure that you will agree that the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the concept of mortal and venial sins constitute a lynch pin between the two sacraments. The Sacrament of Reconciliation allows us to have our sins forgiven so that we can receive Holy Communion while in the "state of grace". It also provides us with a reason for regularly examining our conscience.

We have not examined the teaching materials used to teach religious education to state school primary and secondary students and we are keen to discover what further education is given on mortal sins, the “state of grace” and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is our view that sacramental programs for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion heavily influence students’ attitudes to these sacraments for the rest of their lives. That is why it is very important to provide them with a clear and complete understanding of the sacraments during the programs.

Astonishingly, it was stated in a Broken Bay Diocese catechist certificate course on “Ecumenism” that the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese has, in the past, allowed Protestants attending Catholic services to receive Eucharist, regardless of the “state of grace” requirement.

In almost every parish, very few parishioners actually attend Confession and yet almost everyone goes to Holy Communion on a Sunday. Clearly, there is a problem here, since it would appear that most people are not observing the “state of grace” requirement. As a matter of interest, would you let me know when the importance of regular confession was last preached from the pulpit or discussed in your parish newsletters, since there is clearly a widespread belief that Confession is optional these days? Indeed, those I have heard from, think it unlikely that ordinary people would commit mortal sins!

Sadly, this problem has been there for years, but bishops and priests have either not noticed it or have chosen to ignore it. Surely, the lack of attendance at Confession coupled with almost universal attendance at Holy Communion would have set off alarm bells? By not teaching the essential fundamentals of these two sacraments to our children, we are acting contrary to the Catechism, Canon Law and the Tradition of the Church and are putting their souls at risk.

Paragraph 1385 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:-

“To respond to this invitation we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St Paul urges us to examine our conscience, ‘Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread or drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself’. 216 Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.”

The implication of this paragraph seems to be that the Church must educate all who are to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion so that they can determine if they have committed a mortal sin before allowing them to receive either the Sacraments of Reconciliation or Holy Communion.

Paragraph 1457 states:-

“According to the Church’s command, ‘after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year’. 56 Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received a sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving communion and there is no possibility of going to

Confession. 57 Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time. 58

The Church has a duty to provide education to children so that they can, in turn, fulfil their duty under the paragraph which is that children need to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before making their First Holy Communion.

The Catechism is backed up by the Code of Canon Law

Canon 989 "All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound faithfully to confess their grave sins at least once a year".

This implies that children should have been instructed so that they can do this when being prepared for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Interestingly, the need to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation has not been encouraged in our parish until recently.

Canon. 916 states:- "Anyone who is conscious of grave sin may not celebrate Mass or receive the Body of the Lord without previously having been to sacramental confession, unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, which includes the resolve to go to confession as soon as possible.

Canon 916 implies that everyone receiving Holy Communion including children have to have the capacity to determine if they have committed a mortal sin.

Both the Catechism and the Code of Canon Law are expected to be complied with. Yet this is not happening.

Those providing religious education in our schools and in State schools have a responsibility to provide ongoing education in regard to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. In this connection, we ask if we could meet with you so that we can discuss these matters further and also to discuss other issues we have with the course *To Know, Worship and Love*.

As we are also asking Mr Cleary to meet with us to discuss the same matters, could one meeting be arranged so that we could meet with both of you at the same time? We wish to show you a PowerPoint presentation on the findings of our group on the review of the textbooks *To Know Worship and Love*.

We believe that the sacramental programs for Reconciliation and Eucharist need to be reviewed and then revised to accord with the requirements of the Catechism and the Code of Canon Law.

Children receiving these sacraments for the first time should be taught what a mortal sin is and how to decide which sins are mortal and which are venial. They should be taught what being in a "state of grace" is and of the requirement to be in a "state of grace" before receiving Holy Communion. This should be strongly reinforced by religious education with emphasis in subsequent years in Catholic schools and in Catechist lessons in the State schools.

Action also needs to be taken to explain to congregations in our churches which sins are mortal, as many parishioners do not correctly understand the concept. The same needs to be done to explain the concept of "state of grace" and the requirement that only those in the "state of grace" can receive Holy Communion.

Yours sincerely,

John Kennedy

For New Perspectives for Catholic Education Group

The following signatories support John Kennedy's letter:-

John Taylor, Garrick Small, Catharine Chu, Dr. Leonard Chu, James Manwaring, Reg Wong, Peter Beswick, Warren Roche, Terry Kennedy and Royce Crittle.

\*Contact details of all signatories attached