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THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HONG KONG

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21st September 2021

To: All Catholic Schools

Dear Supervisors and Principals,

Education Day (26th September 2021)

“Consecrate Us In The Truth”

[Circular No. 2021-2022/CEO/010]

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong designates the fourth Sunday in September every year as "Education Day." The purpose is to reaffirm the importance of education to individuals and society and to enhance its impact.

The theme of this year's Education Day "Consecrate us in the truth" and related reference materials are drawn from the prayers in the Gospel Acclamation, the Entrance Antiphon, the three Scripture Readings, the Responsorial Psalm and the Communion Antiphon of the 26th Sunday Liturgy of Ordinary Time.

Consecration refers to separating people from the world and making them exclusive to God. In today's world of unpredictable changes, followers of Christ must realize that they should be consecrated by God in truth. This belief is of great significance to the faithful who have been entrusted with the mission of education.

Let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to encourage us to listen to and practise the words of the Lord every day with a sincere and receptive heart, to sanctify ourselves, to strengthen our convictions, to remain faithful to our roles, to be in the world without being worldly, to be salt of the earth and light of the world so as to transfigure our society, and to hold His promise as our hope and comfort.

Please convey the message of the Education Day to your staff, students and their parents during assemblies or prayer meetings held before or after the designated day. I have attached herewith some materials for your reference.

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation and may God bless you.

Respectfully yours in Christ,



(Kung Kwong Pui, Joseph)
Episcopal Delegate for Education

Education Day 2021
(Sunday, September 26, 2021)

“Consecrate Them In The Truth”

1. Before the Passion, Jesus prayed as the High Priest to the Heavenly Father for His disciples, “They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth.” (John 17:16-17).

To be consecrated in Truth

2. To consecrate is to separate man from the world so that he is exclusively for God. Christ our Lord prays to the Father that we may all be immersed in the truth of the Word so as to be sanctified, to transcend the worldly, be pleasing to God and dispatched by Him as witnesses.
3. Christ calls us to be His disciples primarily to pursue at all times the truth of The Word. We are to read, listen, appreciate, reflect and to live out God’s words in the Bible each and every day, and to constantly cherish our intimacy with Christ Himself, i.e., the Incarnate Word, namely, “to stay faithful to His words” (Ref. Jn 8:31, 15:7) so as to learn the truth that “will set us free and make us holy,” (Ref. Jn 8:32, 17:19); and to live by the Holy Spirit who “will guide us to all truth” (Ref. Jn 14:17, 16:13).
4. The truth of the Word lights up and nurtures distinctive traits of Christians in us, so that our hearts and mind can be detached from the world. We understand the true meaning of life, which enables us to be fully aware that we are in the world but do not belong to it, rendering the outlooks of our body, mind and soul, the patterns of our thoughts, words and deeds, and even the whole person in its entirety, completely submissive to God and to His will, thus fulfilling the mission He has entrusted us faithfully.

Mission of education

5. God calls man and entrusts each with a different mission, and thus the gifts of the Holy Spirit for everyone are diverse. Those entrusted with the mission of educating the young are to “train children in the way they should go; even when they are old, they will not swerve from it.” (Ref. Prov 22:6) Together with our children, we educators ought to listen to the truth of the Lord Jesus, to be taught in Him, to be renewed in our hearts and minds, and to put on the new self that is clothed in God’s “righteousness and holiness” (Ref. Eph 4:21-24).

To teach children to seek out the Truth

6. The vision and mission of all Catholic schools in Hong Kong centre around the five core values, namely, pursuit of truth, upholding of justice, practice of charity, reverence for life and safeguards for the family. Catholic education attaches great importance to cultivate the enthusiasm of both teachers and students for pursuing truth and a mentality of submitting themselves to the truth, and of being humbled before it.
7. Both teachers and school children ought to listen and always remain open to the Word of God, accepting the truth of His revelation and learning to respond to it positively. Or else we might become deaf and mute like the man in the "Decapolis" district when we try to evangelize and bear witness to the gospel, for we would be incapable of understanding nor speaking out clearly the Word of God. God also gives us intellect so that everyone has the capacity for reasoning to seek the truth. To facilitate young minds in their yearning for truth, especially the truth about

God and the meaning of life, we must preserve and stimulate such capacity to seek the truth. Such capacity should not be suppressed, nor allowed to wane or even deadened. Catholic education values wisdom, which enables a person to distinguish right from wrong and good from evil. Wisdom is to be treasured above all other kinds of knowledge. Thus discussion in class involving critical thinking is held to be far more beneficial to students than teacher-centred indoctrination.

8. The mission of Catholic education is to assist students in exploring, with their God-given intellect, the mysteries of life, which will eventually lead them to know the truth about the Creator. God creates and preserves all things out of love (CCC27). He reveals Himself with loving words and deeds. He is eternally faithful in His desire to relate to man intimately. This intimacy uniquely summons everyone to transcend his own darkness and limitations so as to take part in the communion of love with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, i.e., the Holy Trinity and in His infinite divinity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, incarnated at specific time and space of human history. He is all-loving, compassionate and merciful to man and gives witness to the love of the Heavenly Father for all mankind through teaching, forgiving sins, driving out demons and healing the sick. Though innocent, he silently bears all the weaknesses, evils and sins of the human nature and willingly goes through the entire way of the cross to be crucified. He utterly sacrifices Himself, Soul, Body and Blood to fulfil the Father's plan of salvation. Finally, His resurrection reveals the most profound truth about God, namely, He is the self-communicating God who, in essence, is eternally forgiving love. Christ establishes the Church to help us grow in the relationship with God and with others. Like Christ, we are to become tangible signs of God's love pertaining to the fulfilment of a loving relationship among all mankind, which is the ultimate goal of our God-given human nature.
9. Thus a truthful man must display integrity with whomever he is interacting in deeds and in words (known as honesty) (CCC2468), or else his relationship with others and with God will be impaired. Honesty is a virtue. Jesus wants us to love the truth unconditionally, teaching us to "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no'. Anything more is from the evil one." (Mt 5:37) We should not distort the truth, or lead anyone into error with untruthful words. We should uphold the principle of telling the truth and put it into practice, even at a cost. We should also request others to tell the truth, because lying is the most direct offense against the truth -- that is, against God Himself (see CCC2483). In addition, we should strive to maintain inter-personal trustworthiness in the community by discerning copious information on social media and preventing the circulation of unverified information.

Looking at rules and regulations in an unworldly way

10. For the Israelites, ever since their Covenant with God, they have had precepts and laws. Their country was conquered as a result of their repeated abandonment of the Lord. They became a small and insignificant people, with no prophets nor leaders. But Daniel and several Jewish youths had no complaint, recognizing that "by a proper judgment You have done all this....." (Ref. Dan 3:28) They chose to defy the king's orders and refuse to worship the golden statue. They would rather be cast into the white-hot furnace, but they still continued to trust and praise the Lord, and sing to glorify His justice, so as to show their loyalty and humble confession. This is our due attitude towards the Lord's commandments.
11. Over the past two years, the education sector in Hong Kong has been affected by political circumstances and the outbreak of COVID-19, which have together subjected teachers, students, administrative and support staff, as well as school sponsoring bodies to new laws, regulations and administrative directives. At the same time, they have to adapt to the "new ecology" of

learning and teaching in the new setting, which includes a wide range of changes in such areas as curriculum, subjects, teaching materials, pedagogies, teaching time-frame, extra-curricular activities, professional training, codes of conduct for teachers & students, and handling complaints, etc. This has encumbered school staff with heavy burdens, and narrowed the scope of teacher autonomy in teaching. Indeed, the government may need to implement new regulations, policies or measures in response to the current situations. Yet each of the new measures thus introduced may have a direct bearing on either collective or individual rights of the people. Thus different people may have different feelings and different degrees of acceptance in response to the new measures. Facing up to such unprecedented challenges, some teachers subdued and continue to perform their duties responsibly, whereas others may discern the call of another alternative and leave their teaching posts after due consideration.

12. Secular law is not, after all, God's law, which is full of grace and mercy. It is impossible to expect those regulated or bound by secular law to behave in the same way as King David did, for he praised God's law as "perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, pure, enduring, just..." (Ref. Ps 19:8-10), because the law of the Lord stems from His love for man, which enables one to spontaneously alert oneself not to abandon the His way owing to one's own conceited pride and ignorance (Ref. Ps 19:12-14). By contrast, one wonders whether the introduction of new laws and regulations in society aims to have preventive measures in place, or merely to bring about intimidating and suppressive effects. Apart from raising public concern about the consequences of violating such laws, the change may also be disturbing for innocent individuals who worry constantly about breaking them accidentally and unintentionally.
13. However, Christians often hold the truth because they keep the words of Christ at heart. Hence, whether secular laws are lenient or strict, they still live in true freedom, free from being slaves of the evil (Ref. Jn 8:31-34), and always remain hopeful regardless of the future. They know that all things work for good for those who love God (Ref. Rom 8:28). Therefore, Catholic teachers who are committed to the Catholic education mission will continue to uphold their beliefs and enhance the integral development of students spiritually, morally, academically, physically, socially, and aesthetically. They will not be bound by past teaching experience. Knowledgeable and competent teachers can tell which kind of education is most critical to students' growth. They will think about how to inspire students, to facilitate and deepen their understanding of humanity in a broader sense of time and space, to explore future challenges that have not yet emerged today. Such teachers are sensitive enough to capture and make use of apt opportunities to inspire students to uncover the ultimate meaning of life. "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my spirit upon him..... He will not contend or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory." (Mt 12:18-20)
14. Under new norms of teaching and learning in the school environment, Catholic teachers, especially those who believe in lives touching lives, should be open and make new attempts within feasible limits. As students explore the ultimate meaning of life and actualize values so as to cultivate virtues, they need to rely on teachers who consistently "walk the talk" to be their role models. Teachers should be open-minded, eager to learn, and have full comprehension of the current social condition and its development. They are to inspire new generations with truth and with lessons learnt from history. They seek to be enlightened by God's Word and be aided by the Spirit of Truth, so that they may traverse darkness and filth of tombs and cease to "seek the living among the dead." (Lk 24:5) For teachers who aspire to be truly wise while still struggling to surpass the secular culture, and to "shine brightly like the splendor of the

firmament leading many to justice..." (Ref. Dn 12:3) , the only way is to turn to, gaze at and listen to Christ. Then they can "see all things new in Christ," (theme of the 500th anniversary of St. Ignatius' conversion) reckoning all things in Christ's perspective. Then they will see the path to pursue.

Looking at power and wealth in an unworldly way

15. In Numbers, there were two elders who were bestowed with gifts of prophecies without joining the gathering at Moses' tent. They were questioned if they should prophesize. And in the gospel there was a man who was not of Jesus' company but he exorcised in Jesus' name. He was stopped by the disciples. Even Joshua, sent by God to come after Moses to lead the chosen people to the promised land, and even John, Jesus' beloved disciple as well, hardly did they escape from the worldly mentality of breeding discontent-and jealousy when others might have surpassed them in terms of significance and success. James, speaking in his capacity as the bishop of Jerusalem, condemned the rich who hoarded unneeded wealth, indulged in luxurious feasts, suffocated their own conscience, exploited workers, withheld wages, arbitrarily accused righteous people who were defenseless with no resistance, convicting or even killing them. All these evils stem from endless greed for wealth and power. Today, we have not yet learnt from history. How similar are the mistakes we make to those of our predecessors?
16. To enhance livelihood, our society must focus most of our attention and efforts on economic development. Thus many people consider the indicators of success to be wealth, power, reputation and status. Inevitably some among us may have yielded to the prevailing social ambience of submitting to the powerful and the rich. But Jesus, our model, who has the profoundest reverence for His Heavenly Father, has conquered the Devil's temptation of material wealth, fame, status, worldly splendor and power. The Church has consistently and unequivocally continued with Christ's mission "to bring glad tidings to the poor.....to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.....", (Lk 4:18) just as Mother Teresa, who devoted her life to serving the poor; and Archbishop Oscar Romero, who pointed out structural causes of poverty and in return let himself be regarded as a dissident and threatened with death by those in powerful, and who still fearlessly voiced out issues of institutional injustice in society.
17. We agree that it is important for our society to sustain steady development. Yet we also advocate and speak up for the protection of human dignity. We treasure spiritual values and will never allow ourselves to be caught up in the vortex of worldly power struggles.

Looking at new things in an unworldly way

18. Moses earnestly wished all God's people would become prophets though they might not be in his tent, whereas Jesus acknowledged the man exorcising in His name though he was not among His companions, "For whoever is not against us is for us." (Mk 9:40) We praise the amazing generosity of the Holy Spirit in bestowing upon man new abilities and new lives. Christians will not turn a blind eye to the grace of the Holy Spirit due to limitations of their cognition or their own narrow-mindedness, when they examine or assess public policies and measures which are not initiated or championed by them, but which do contribute to the common good or individuals' personal growth. Nor should Christians reject people not belonging to their own groups by clinging onto minor details or insignificant matters, nor negate others' positive influence with a stiff attitude. Similarly, we hope that the Government or the leaders of major institutions will value individuals or organizations that have the same good intentions, abilities and strengths and consider empowering them to share the common mission of serving the community. Regarding evangelization and ecumenical movements, Christian churches should

make allowances for greater flexibility so as to obtain greater benefit from the work of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, the priorities of charitable work or volunteer services within each of the Christian Churches, or the developmental goals and strategies of different Christian schools should always highlight their unity amidst their rich diversities.

19. On the other hand, Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." (Mt 12:30) In fact, these are two different expressions of Jesus' same position, that one must make one's own choice whether to follow and obey Jesus or not, and must not be as ambiguous as fence-sitters. We Christians cannot rule out the possibility that one day we will be forced to make the most fundamental choice between "following Christ" or "opposing Christ", as how St. Thomas More had chosen between abiding by the teachings of the Church, or a new law announced by King Henry VIII, which required his total submission to the sovereign as Head of the English Church.
20. Secular value systems of the world today rarely present situations of absolute dualistic oppositions. The major features of the secular world are, in addition to the supremacy of power cum interests and material hedonism, moral relativism and agnosticism in regard to the existence of God. The latter is a more laissez-faire disregard for God than atheists, because those influenced by scientism believe that God's existence is non-recognizable or cannot be established by human wisdom. The younger generations use the inconclusive, and thus meaningless, discussion of God's existence as an excuse, and therefore they do not bother to explore, "Who cares? What's that to do with me?" This new culture poses a greater challenge to Catholic educators. If young people and students fail to acquire in their fundamental education appropriate spiritual knowledge, good news of the Gospel, experience of the Lord's love, values and ethics in the light of the Catholic faith, various trends of thoughts will greatly impact them as they graduate from schools to pursue further tertiary studies or work. Catholic educators have to work especially hard to prepare the minds of young people, so that they can get rid of their spiritual sloth and understand that empirical science is not the only way to establish truth.

Looking at good and evil in an unworldly way

21. Jesus resolutely urged all those involved in child care to protect children and ensure that they are on the path of the Lord. He was very strict with those who breach their duty (Ref. Mk 9:42), which was a sharp warning for Catholic educators. Teachers must be careful to protect students from negative influences of various specious claims and arguments of post-modern society, which oppose Christ's teaching, including the gender theory and the comprehensive sex education curricula implemented in some countries. These theories stem from arrogance and desire for absolute subjective individualism and freedom. Once children and young people are misled to take the first wrong step, they may suffer prolonged great pain in the future.
22. Jesus, on the one hand, strongly demanded that man should not compromise with sin but must cut off from the sources of temptation even if he has to make great sacrifice. On the other hand, He promised to reward the smallest acts of kindness done for the sake of loving Him, such as giving His disciples a glass of water. But secular society mostly judges the right or wrong of behavior by adopting moral relativism, where the boundary between the two has become extremely blurred. This makes the originally improper behavior innocuous as long as many are doing it; or it becomes purely a matter of opinion; or it may be mistaken to think that so long as there is a good motive, an evil deed can be justified; and those who willingly do good out of compassion are ridiculed as fools.

23. Mother Teresa's famous saying 'to do small things with great love' has become a motto of all Christians. "Never fail to do anything good which you deem petty; never dare to do anything evil which you consider trivial." Christians should not only bear in mind this Chinese motto, but should also reflect on the circumstances under which we do good or avoid evil. We ought to do it for Christ, because He said, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." "And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Mt 10:40, 18:5, 25:40) It is just like St. Thérèse of Lisieux (St. Therese of the Child Jesus) seeking to do good in simple, ordinary daily life, pleasing God in small things like a child trying to please his/her father. This has become her "Little Way of Spiritual Childhood" for sanctification.

Unworldly hope and comfort in sorrow

24. The enduring hope and comfort of Christians is based on God's promise. The dark side of our human nature, pride, jealousy, betrayal, hypocrisy, impertinence, self-defense, fear, ignorance, etc., breeding all kinds of sins and evils, has ended up in Christ being slaughtered like a lamb on the cross. During his lifetime, his continual return and faithful submission to the will of the Heavenly Father, his quiet forbearance and endurance of the consequences of man's sins, his Sacrifice on the Cross, together has broken the vicious circle and shackles of sins and evils. He defeated the power of evils and death with His endless love and utter obedience to the Father's will, even unto death. He has thus forever fulfilled the Father's promise of our salvation. The complete manifestation of the fulfillment of this promise is the unfailing hope that we Christians rely on in order to transcend the dark side of humanity while we face adversities in our life journey on earth.
25. Many renowned figures and opinion leaders of society have given the public copious analyses and predictions of the future, and even advice on outlooks of life in line with the new norms. But Christ has already pointed out to us the attitudes we should have in life: be poor in spirit, be mournful, be meek, be hungry and thirsty for justice, be merciful, be clean of heart, be peaceful, and be willing to suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness. Such is the only way to get through life in this world and attain the glory of humanity.
26. The Lord is the ultimate master of human history. His teachings and promises are the guiding light in dark nights. They are our most appropriate prayers and hope amidst our hardships. As He will not forget His promise to His servants, how much more will He remember to fulfil His promise to His children? "Remember your word to your servant by which you give me hope. This is my comfort in affliction....." (Ps 119:49-50)

To be consecrated in Truth

27. The wish of the Lord Jesus is that we can often be immersed in truth—the Word of God—in order to be transformed and differentiated from the secular world, and to belong exclusively to God and carry out His will.
28. Efforts made to listen and to follow God's Word cannot be rendered just once and for all. Instead we must have continual practice each and every day. It is our aspirations that educators shouldering such a sacred mission will listen daily to the truth of the Lord, together with students under our care, so that we all may be taught in Him, be sanctified and detached from the secular world, and be made worthy to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world, so as to shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, thus leading many to justice!

Education Day 2021

(Sunday, September 26, 2021)

“Consecrate Them In The Truth”

Prayer of the Faithful (for reference only)

1. Let us pray for the Universal Church and the Church in Hong Kong. May the Holy Spirit enlighten and guide our pastors to loyally follow the teachings of the Head of the Church -- Christ the Lord Himself when faced with challenges inside and outside the church, to witness the truth, uphold justice, practise charity, pour out mercy, bring about peace and always remain hopeful. For this, we pray to the Lord.
2. Let us pray for the Hong Kong society. May the Lord grant our SAR leaders, all decision-makers and the general public abundant graces of the Holy Spirit, the mind to respect and obey the truth, the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong, the broad and in-depth vision and insight, the ability to appreciate diversity and empowerment in the spirit of communion and cooperation. For this, we pray to the Lord.
3. Let us pray for Catholic schools. May the Lord bless their school culture so that the community life at schools may reveal that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. May the Lord help teachers and students uplift their hearts, develop their potential, find the meaning of life, imitate Christ, live a pious and dignified life, and spread the gospel. For this, we pray to the Lord.
4. Let us pray for educators. May the Lord accompany them individually, give them wisdom and intelligence, motivation and love, patience and courage so that they may remain steadfast in their professional roles and may learn while teaching students. May God lead them to listen to and meditate on His Words every day, so that they may know the truth and always have hope when faced with new challenges. For this, we pray to the Lord.
5. Let us pray for students. May the Lord protect them, enlighten them with clear values and strengthen their sense of right and wrong so that they may be inspired to resist temptation, to choose what is good and to renounce all vices, to love and cherish life, to enrich themselves and resolve to contribute to society and to serve others. For this, we pray to the Lord.
6. Let us pray for the family. May the Lord be with every family so that all members can embrace each other with love, patience, understanding, forgiveness and self-sacrifice. May the Lord especially bless the parents so that they may nurture children by their good example, pursue and practise with them the truth revealed by Christ. For this, we pray to the Lord.