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From: Catholic Education Office
To : Supervisors and Principals of ALL Catholic Secondary and Primary Schools
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New Measures to Enhance Religious Education in Hong Kong Catholic Schools

Background

The hallmark of Catholic school education rests on the set of Catholic values it presents to youngsters to lead them to Jesus Christ and to the path of Life He has instructed us. The strength of the Catholic identity of the school is reflected in the effectiveness of its religious education (RE*) and its overall campus atmosphere, both of which depends on its institutional constitution, its organizational structure, its deployment of human resources and its pastoral schemes. (* Hereafter RE may refer to any one of the following: Religious Education / Education in Biblical Knowledge / Religious and Moral Education / Ethics and Religious Studies)

Regarding the statutory aspect, with the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) now at the helm, the School Sponsoring Bodies including the various Religious Institutes, Caritas Hong Kong and the Catholic Diocese, have all written down their visions and missions and their perceived core values of Catholic education in their IMC Constitutions, thereby confirming the legal status of such beliefs and the statutory nature of their practical functioning at school. These values and their realization have become the distinctive norms for Catholic school education, alongside the offer of two lesson-periods of Religious Education per week in all Catholic schools, and “Ethics & Religious Studies” as a preferred elective subject in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, both promulgated by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong since 1st June, 1993 and 9th February, 2007, respectively.

Regarding the organizational structure and human resources, the RE subject teachers of Catholic schools play an important role in the development of the overall religious education in their schools. In view of this, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong is to implement new measures to enhance RE, aiming to build the capacity of RE teachers as well as to optimize manpower management and organizational support in Catholic schools. These new measures reiterate the appropriate status of religious education in Catholic schools and strengthen the essence of their Catholic identity so that the visions of Catholic education may be fully inherited, actualized and fulfilled.

Goals of the New Measures

The new measures aim at:

1. Optimizing the institutional organization, human resource management and teacher formation for the implementation religious education in schools ;
2. Assisting schools in effectively implementing religious education and in fostering talents for this purpose.

The outline of the new measures and their applicability

A. All Catholic primary and secondary schools are requested to implement the following three new measures to enhance religious education according to the prescribed time schedule.

1. RE lessons should be allocated to only those teachers assigned especially to teach the subject;
2. RE teachers should first complete a relevant teacher development program recommended by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong before they start teaching or continue to teach the subject;
3. The schools should each set up a specialized post of Religious Education Coordinator.

B. Target group of the new measures

1. All three new measures above are applicable only to full-time RE teachers of Catholic schools in Hong Kong.
2. The second new measure above is not applicable, for the time being, to RE teachers who have not yet mastered Cantonese.

Details of the New Measures

A. The First New Measure: RE lessons should only be assigned to teachers especially responsible for teaching the subject.

1. Current number of RE subject teachers in schools

According to the school questionnaire survey held in December 2016 (as tabulated below), in some schools, especially primary schools, the teaching load of RE lessons tended to be scattered among teachers. The number of teachers involved was large, and the number of RE lessons taken up by each teacher was much fewer. In general, the time and energy put in by teachers for RE lesson preparation and for the development of the subject was not as much as that put in other main subjects. This is unfavorable to the long-term development of the RE subject.

	< 5 teachers	> 10 teachers	Average No. of teachers	Average No. of RE lessons taught by each teacher per week or cycle
Primary	30% of schools surveyed	12 schools	6.6	5.5 lessons
Secondary	72% of schools surveyed	1 school	4.6	11.2 lessons

2. New Measure:

The teaching of the RE subject in primary and secondary schools should be assigned to a special group of responsible teachers, who thus will have more energy and time to plan for the development of the subject, and to participate in continual professional development for individual teachers of the subject.

- i. In general RE lessons should preferably constitute about one third of the teaching load of an RE teacher;
- ii. In principle, RE teachers should only teach RE and one other subject;
- iii. There should be adequate and sound reason for the Principal to assign a third subject to an RE teacher;

- iv. Regarding the appropriate total number of RE teachers in individual schools, a reference table is provided in the appendix (i.e., Item A in the Appendix);
- v. Schools offering RE as an elective subject in the Diploma for Secondary Education Examination may provide more RE teachers as needs arise;
- vi. Catholic teachers not assigned to teach RE should contribute to the planning and organizing of religious activities to strengthen the work of the Religious Education Team in the school;
- vii. RE teachers should be in close contact with one another and form a small religious/faith community with all other Catholic colleagues in the school. They should meet regularly for religious activities and cooperate closely to create and enhance a Catholic religious atmosphere in the school;
- viii. The first five years from the effective date of the new measures will be designated as the transition period. After the transition period, this specific new measure will be fully implemented.

B. The second new measure:

RE teachers should show alignment with the Catholic faith, the Catholic education philosophy and the vision and mission of the School in word and deed. They should first complete a relevant teacher development program recommended by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong before they start teaching or continue to teach the subject.

1. Current status of the professional qualifications of RE teachers

According to the school questionnaire survey of December 2016 (as tabulated below), the proportion of current RE teachers who had completed the Two-Year Catechetical Training Courses of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre was less than half in primary schools and about two-thirds in secondary schools. If RE is an important carrier and the most direct manifestation of the characteristics and values of Catholic education, then RE teachers should be required to complete specific teacher development programs, which are recommended by the Diocese to be professional qualifications for teaching the RE subject, just as their counterparts responsible for all compulsory core subjects.

	Percentage of RE Teachers having completed the Two-Year Catechetical Training Course of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre
Secondary	64%
Primary	43%

- 2. New Measure:** RE teachers should show alignment with the Catholic faith, the Catholic educational philosophy and the vision and mission of the School in word and deed. They should first complete a relevant teacher development program as recommended by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong to be the basic formation before they start teaching or continue to teach the subject. This also applies to those teaching Ethics & Religious Studies as an elective subject in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. RE teachers should also continue to pursue courses or professional activities related to religious education in a timely manner, keeping abreast with recent developments.

- i. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong has recently established "The Committee on

the Professional Development of Religious Education Teachers in Hong Kong Catholic Schools" (hereinafter referred to as "The Committee on the PD of RE Teachers" or "CPDRET") as a standing sub-committee of the Hong Kong Catholic Board of Education to be responsible for the deliberation, review and subsequent recommendation regarding the professional development of RE teachers including their pre-service formation and continual in-service education, the evaluation of relevant programs and of the progressive needs of RE teachers at various stages of their professional advancement, etc.

- ii. The Diocese will announce to all Catholic schools the relevant programs recommended via the Catholic Education Office with updates at appropriate time intervals.
- iii. The programs recommended by the Diocese for RE teachers cannot be taken as a substitute for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Programme stipulated for the application for teacher registration with the Education Bureau.
- iv. The first five years from the effective date of the new measures will be designated as the transition period. During the transition period teachers who have not fully completed the RE teacher formation programs recommended by the Diocese can still continue to teach the subject. After the transition period, the new measures will be fully implemented. Teachers of Catholic schools should have completed an RE teacher formation program recommended by the Diocese before they are to teach the subject.
- v. Individual teachers who have been teaching RE before the effective date of the new measures, if for a very special reason and due to unforeseen circumstances, fail to complete a formation program recommended by the Diocese during the transition period, they may apply to the Catholic Education Office for a maximum of a 3-year extension of the transition period via the principals of their schools within one year after the end of the official transition period, making up a maximum of 8 years of transition for these special cases.
- vi. After the end of the transition period, RE teachers who have completed a recommended program and are still serving as RE teachers in Catholic schools should complete continual development programs recommended by the Committee on the PD of RE Teachers (CPDRET) every five years.
- vii. In order to ensure that schools can cope with unforeseen personnel changes when assigning teaching duties, if after the transition period a newly recruited teacher who has not yet completed a teacher formation program recommended by the Diocese needs to be assigned RE lessons, the principal should apply for him/her annually to the Catholic Education Office to become a temporary RE teacher. The temporary RE teacher should complete a teacher formation program as recommended by the Diocese within 3 years. If there are special reasons, the principal may apply for him/her an extension of the temporary status at the end of the three-year period.
- viii. In view of this new measure, school principals are to perform some related administrative tasks accordingly:

- a To discuss with the RE teachers and other Catholic teachers the future manpower allocation and deployment of the RE department, and arrange for teachers who have not yet completed any recommended program to complete one during the 5-year transition period. At present, the Diocese has, as a temporary measure, already recommended the "Two-Year Catechetical Training Course" offered by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre, and the "Diploma Course for Religious & Moral Educators of Catholic Schools (to be completed in 2 to 5 years)" offered by the Caritas Institute of Higher Education;
- b To keep copies of the certificates obtained each year by RE teachers completing relevant courses recommended by the Diocese;
- c To verify each year that all RE teachers have met the developmental requirements made known by the Catholic Education Office in accordance with the recommendations made by the Committee on the PD of RE Teachers (CPDRET);
- d To instruct RE teachers to prepare their own training and continual professional development records;
- e To report the following information to the IMC and the Catholic Education Office:- details of the Sacraments of Initiation received by RE teachers, their initial RE formation and continual development, their applications to the CEO for special permission and other relevant data;
- f To apply to the IMC for reasonable funding for provision of subsidies to RE teachers who are assigned to attend relevant programs to facilitate the development of the RE subject and the deployment of its teaching staff, as the EDB does not offer any relevant teacher development courses and activities free of charge, as it regularly does for virtually all other subjects.

C. The third new measure: Schools should set up a special post of Religious Education Coordinator(REC)

1. Current duties and ranks of "Religious Education Coordinators"

- i. The prominence of the religious atmosphere in a Catholic school as well as the inheritance and actualization of the Catholic values totally hinge on the manifestation and testimony of faith in the daily lives of Catholic teachers and students in the school. They also depend on the quality and quantity of religious elements in the school's formal, informal and hidden curricula of both RE and other subjects. The school should have a senior teacher specially assigned to assist the principal in the planning and the promoting of school-wide religious education, in leading relevant teachers and pastoral staff to actively plan for and promote the overall faith formation among staff and students of the school community, in both the specific and the broad sense of religious education.
- ii. In order to fulfil the above-mentioned duties, this specially assigned senior teacher should have the corresponding spiritual attributes and authority to work closely with the heads of various subjects and teams especially those related to the formation of students' character, to plan for and assist in the promotion of religious atmosphere,

relevant subject content and related activities. To this end the rank should be at least commensurate with that of a senior graduate teacher or even a vice principal (of either a substantive or school-based rank). However, according to the findings of the school questionnaire survey held in December 2016 (as tabulated below), about half of the current "RECs" in secondary schools, or even more "RECs" in primary schools, had not yet been granted sufficient authority to enable them to perform effectively and take full responsibility for school-based religious and moral education in both its specific and broader sense.

	With REC	Rank of Current REC & Percentage of Each in Schools Surveyed				
Secondary	91%	SPSM 7%	PSM 20%	APSM 37%	Other Ranks	36%
Primary	91%	PGM 9%	SGM 43%	GM 27%	Other Ranks	21%

2. New Measure:

The school should set up in due course a special post of Religious Education Coordinator (REC), the bearer of which is meant to be an ex-officio member of the school's core leadership team, so that the RE Coordinator and the Principal will together assume responsibility for the effectiveness of the school's religious and moral education.

- i. Duties: The REC is the leader and coordinator of the school's religious and moral education. He/She (hereafter referred to as "he") should be involved in the teaching of the RE subject, and depending on his workload, he may serve or need not serve as the head or deputy head of the RE department. He should be assisting the principal in planning the school-wide religious education and should lead relevant teachers to actively plan for and promote the school's overall religious education, Catholic values and spiritual formation, including the formal or informal, subject-based or interdisciplinary and even the hidden curricula of RE and other subjects, that is, Religious Education in both the specific and the broad sense. (***This special post serves to promote and enhance the religious elements within various disciplines, the development of the RE subject and the RE Team, the pastoral care for teachers, students and parents, and the liaison with parishes, and to establish online resource platforms for religious education. See Appendix: Item B, for details of proposed Job Specifications.***)
- ii. School-based adjustment of the title and duties of the "REC": Schools may alter some minor items in the proposed job specifications in response to their school-based needs. However, it should be ensured that the job contents as listed in the Appendix to this document are executed by appropriate teachers. The corresponding school-based adjustment made to the title of this post may take the form of "Coordinator of Religious Education and", that is, "Religious Education" should be highlighted as its primary concern.
- iii. Rank and Title:
 - a Depending on the duties and responsibilities assigned by the school, the IMC may consider accepting a competent REC with experience to apply for promotion to a higher rank in the teaching staff establishment;
 - b Title: If necessary or for administrative convenience, the IMC may, at an

appropriate time, create for this post an appropriate school-based job title of "Assistant Principal / Vice Principal (Religious Education)", which is not necessarily related to any substantive rank or remuneration.

- iv. Schools considering the establishment of this REC for the first time may achieve it in stages: (1) To arrange a suitable teacher to serve in this acting position; (2) Depending on the abilities and performance of the teacher, to consider the need to arrange for other colleagues to take up the position on a rotational basis so as to share the responsibility and nurture more talents; (3) When time is ripe, the IMC is to consider including this special post to be one of the positions for promotion, in order to enable qualified and competent members of the staff to apply for it. Schools must observe the applicants objectively and assess them from multiple perspectives, before empowering their RECs with added responsibilities and authority. Schools must treat all eligible applicants for promotion fairly and impartially in accordance with their established procedures.
- v. Qualifications:
 - a A teacher should have completed relevant programs recommended by the Diocese for RE teachers and should possess outstanding relevant teaching and leadership experience;
 - b Teachers should also pursue further developmental programs recommended for RECs by the Diocese to enhance their enthusiasm and competence in promoting the unique mission of the Catholic School;
 - c Applicants for all promotional ranks must have also fulfilled every relevant requirement of the Education Bureau for promotion to such ranks, including the completion of training courses prescribed by the Education Bureau.
- vi. Performance appraisal: The principal should establish a performance appraisal procedure with its content and criteria in line with the assigned duties of the REC. The principal should write performance appraisal reports on the REC on a regular basis in accordance with the school's performance appraisal mechanism. The IMC can meet with the principal and the REC to provide guidance and support when necessary.
- vii. It is recommended that schools start moving on to achieve the above aims as soon as possible, by strategically deploying and continually training the much required manpower. Schools should set a school-based time schedule for smooth transition to full implementation of this new measure, which may take 5 to 8 years starting from the effective date of this new measure.

Implementation and Follow-up of the New Measures

A. The Catholic Education Office is vested with the responsibility to implement the above measures by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong

1. The Catholic Education Office has been appointed to take charge of all practical work in relation to the implementation of the new measures, including communicating with the Diocesan, the Religious and the Caritas School Sponsoring Bodies and the Incorporated Management Committees of their schools, so that they can thoroughly

understand, align with and accomplish the undertaking to implement the new measures.

2. The Catholic Education Office will study and develop relevant viable and prioritized support services to facilitate the implementation of these new measures, such as:
 - a To organize learning circles for interested Religious Education Coordinators, with the aim of mutual enrichment through professional exchange and sharing of faith;
 - b To organize sharing sessions or workshops for teachers of RE and various other subjects, so as to explore how the teaching content of various subjects may be imbued with elements of the Catholic faith and values;
 - c To visit Catholic schools and provide professional advice on relevant curriculum development and effectiveness of classroom teaching;
 - d To conduct pilot schemes among schools to strategically plan and systematically promote school-wide activities related to faith and spirituality.
3. The Catholic Education Office will maintain close contact and communication with the Committee on the PD of RE Teachers (CPDRET) for the continual implementation of these new measures in Catholic schools.
4. The Catholic Education Office will regularly collect relevant data from all Catholic primary and secondary schools on the implementation of these new measures and will report to the Catholic Board of Education in due course.
5. The Catholic Education Office will review the implementation progress three years after the relevant new measures have come into effect. If necessary adjustment will be recommended.

B. Effective date and transition period of the new measures

1. The above three new measures to enhance Religious Education in Catholic schools in Hong Kong will take effect on September 1, 2019.
2. Regarding the first two new measures, namely that RE teachers should specialize in teaching the RE subject and that they should first complete a relevant teacher development program as recommended by the Diocese, a five-year transition period will commence from the effective date till August 31, 2024.
3. As regards the third new measure, namely that schools should set up a special post of Religious Education Coordinator to carry out all relevant duties, the Catholic Education Office will review its progress at least once every four years.

C. Enquiries

For enquiries about the contents of this document, please call the Catholic Education Office at Tel. No. 2881 6163 and contact Ms. Mary Chan (Secondary Schools), Mr. Julian Yip (Primary Schools), Ms. May Yeung (Administration & Development), or the undersigned.

Peter C. Y. LAU
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**New Measures to Enhance Religious Education
in Hong Kong Catholic Schools
Appendix—Supplementary Suggestions**

A. On the first new measure: Religious Education lessons to be assigned only to teachers especially responsible for the RE subject

1. Religious Education (hereafter referred to as “RE”) lessons taken up by individual RE teachers of secondary and primary schools should preferably not be too few. Generally speaking, they may account for about one-third of the total teaching load of each individual RE teacher, who in principle teaches only one other subject. An RE teacher would teach more than two subjects simultaneously only when there is grave and sufficient reason.
2. Schools can arrange teaching manpower for the RE subject according to the number of classes. The following tables are for reference only.

No. of Classes in Primary Schools	No. of RE Teachers for Reference
Less than 13 classes	2-3 teachers
13-18 classes	3-4 teachers
19-24 classes	3-5 teachers
25-30 classes	3-6 teachers
More than 30 classes	3-7 teachers

No. of Classes in Secondary Schools	No. of RE Teachers for Reference *
Less than 19 classes	2-3 teachers
19-24 classes	3-5 teachers
25-30 classes	3-6 teachers
More than 30 classes	3-7 teachers

(* Schools offering the school-based Ethics & Religious Studies as an elective subject may increase the number of RE teachers as needed.)

B. On the third new measure: To set up a special post of Religious Education Coordinator in due course

1. Introduction of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator:
The Religious Education Coordinator (hereafter referred to as “REC”) is the leader of the religious education team of a Catholic school. He/She (hereafter referred to as “he”) has the role of a curriculum coordinator and leader. He should also teach the RE subject and, depending on his workload, may serve or need not serve as the head or the deputy head of the subject department. He leads the school alongside the principal to continually kindle the passion of Catholic teachers, encouraging them to create a religious atmosphere and culture in the school, to support teachers in other disciplines to plan for inclusion and promotion of religious elements in the learning experience of their subjects inside and outside the classroom, to effectively promote the religious education of the whole school, and to secure the Catholic values in the hearts of staff and students.
2. Purpose of setting up the post of REC
 - (i) To stimulate all students
 - a. To help them pursue spiritual growth, to align with the Gospel spirit, to foster a loving heart that is compassionate and ready to serve the needy and the weak;
 - b. To formulate one’s life plan from a Catholic perspective and to discern one’s orientation in life;

- c. To aspire to pursue or put their faith in Christ;
- (ii) To stimulate Catholic students
 - a. To set up religious cell-group to grow deeper in faith;
 - b. To live out and witness one's faith in Christ in both word and deed;
 - c. To follow God's calling in a broad or a specific sense.

3. Scope of duties of the REC in various aspects:

- (i) Religious Education/Formation Team and RE Subject Department
 - a. Collaboration with the Curriculum Development Officer and the Head of Moral & Civic Education in the development of religious and moral elements in various subject curricula or interdisciplinary thematic teaching programs, by imbuing the formal and informal teaching of various subjects with the Catholic faith and core values;
 - b. RE subject teaching, taking charge of or assisting in the planning of the RE Subject Department;
 - c. Supervision of and support to the Teaching Assistant (Pastoral) in his/her role to implement the overall religious education/formation programs of the school;
 - d. Planning and coordinating the work of the Religious Activities/Education Team in order to enhance the Catholic characteristics of the school.
- (ii) Students
 - a. Planning and coordinating religious activities across the school;
 - b. Coordinating faith-formation activities according to the liturgical calendar and the Diocesan theme of the year;
 - c. Organizing religious cell-groups and acting as a mentor;
 - d. Organizing spiritual formation activities for students;
 - e. Revisiting the Catholic values with alumni to facilitate their reflections on life.
- (iii) Teachers
 - a. Nurturing faith by organizing religious activities for the staff and students at large;
 - b. Organizing spiritual formation activities for teachers, encouraging Catholic teachers to form cell-groups of faith, participating in teacher gatherings to deepen their faith;
 - c. Supporting teachers in collaborative lesson planning and teaching of RE, in the preparation of liturgies, morning assemblies, prayers before and after class, Bible study groups, , etc.;
 - d. Coordinating the developmental tasks of various teams in charge of moral education, civic education, ethics, life education, formal and hidden curricula;
- (iv) Parents
 - a. Maintaining contact with Catholic parents;
 - b. Contacting parents of newly arrived children, arranging evangelistic activities for them and for other non-Catholic parents;
- (v) Parish and Deanery
 - a. Enhancing students' sense of belonging to the Parish;
 - b. Maintaining liaison and linkage with the Parish and the Deanery;
- (vi) School-based resource platform for RE

To establish and to manage a school-based physical corner for faith formation, and also an online database platform of Catholic teachings, religious and moral education, in order to support the needs of all stakeholders of the school, including information of, for example, founders of school sponsoring bodies, daily lives of saints, legends about people, places, events celebrated by the school or its sponsoring institutes, etc.