



## **Classroom and Prayer**

Enter the school playground. You are greeted by rowdy, wide eyed students. Immersed in their mobiles, some are chatting away, others listen to music piped through headphones, while others text diligently. In the far corner a group of girls huddle round and tell telling tales. In the other corner they are eyed by the boys. A teacher wanders among them. Amid the noise, the laughter, the chatter, the heated discussions, the kicking of footballs and eating of sandwiches, the card games and avid book readers, what deeper stories are there to be told, somewhere and sometime?

Enter the classroom scene. Words are thrown around: getting good results... literacy and numeracy... competition... bright students... outstanding athletes. What Moran says is that, 'Consequently, students today are commodified objects. They become a statistic that reveals a school's position in terms of success ratings. Not surprisingly many students feel lost in big schools, others gain individual attention through the presentation of various problems while others stand out as achievers – along market lines.'<sup>1</sup>

So let us enter the heart of the matter. Pastoral practice in schools focuses on the subjective world of each and every one of the students. Students who are the top of the class, students who are at the top of the trouble makers list, or students whose voices are rarely heard yet they hand in their homework and pay attention in class and participate in extra curricula activities. Pastoral care of all these many and varied students is life-centred, and realises that they are persons who are more than academic and sporting abilities. Nouwen writes, 'Our relationship with our students is first of all a relationship in which we offer ourselves to our searching students, to help them develop some clarity in the many impressions of their mind and heart and discover patterns of thoughts and feelings on which they can build their own life.'<sup>2</sup>

So perhaps a prayer for today's classrooms could be:

At School, the prayer we pray as teachers and students is that:  
we gather in hospitality,  
that our education be exploratory,  
that we learn to ask the questions and seek the answers together

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<sup>1</sup> Frances M. Moran. *Beyond the culture of care. Helping those souled-out by the market economy.* NSW: St Pauls, 2006:86-91.

<sup>2</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen in *Reaching out. The three movements of the Spiritual life.* New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1986: 90.

that we create a free and fearless space for one another

where physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual development can take place  
where we all have something life giving to offer  
where we discover that life experiences, insights and convictions, are worth attention  
where parents can be part of the school community that learns and grows together,  
and where teachers become receptive  
and students' talents become gifts willingly offered.  
Amen

**Dr Margaret Ghosn**  
**The Broken Bay Institute**  
**Head of Pastoral Theology**