



Social justice immersion experiences - ethical considerations and discussion points



“I have come that all may have life and have it to the full.”
(John 10:10)

Background to this document

As members of a Church concerned for the wellbeing of all, the Diocese of Sandhurst and schools within the Diocese regularly engage in social justice actions and awareness raising activities with the aim of creating a more socially just world.

Actions taken by schools to help create a more socially just world might include things such as:

- Education about the historical and contemporary factors that cause inequity & oppression
- Education about ethical global citizenship & what this entails
- Awareness raising through targeted activities – e.g. Project Compassion activities, White Ribbon Day
- Fundraising e.g. St Vincent de Paul, Caritas
- Raising funds for religious orders who work in communities both locally & overseas
- Living responsibly by purchasing ethically sourced products e.g. avoiding products made through slave or indentured labour
- Lobbying governments through letter writing
- Immersion experiences

This document is specifically designed for use when planning and participating in ***social justice immersions***.

Social Justice Immersion Experiences

Many Catholic secondary schools choose to engage in social justice or cultural immersion experiences with Australian or overseas communities. Schools engage in immersion experiences as one way of being of service and being “present” to host communities whilst on the immersion; this continues afterwards when participants return from their immersion (e.g. through advocacy). These groups can include indigenous or other minority group communities who may be disadvantaged in some way.

Immersion experiences, if based on a sound ethical foundation, have the capacity to develop and raise awareness of participants and be of reciprocal benefit to both the host community and the visiting community.

“It is essential that the planning and conduct of any immersion is clearly grounded in Catholic Social Teaching Principles particularly Human Dignity, Solidarity, the Common Good and Subsidiarity.” *(Just Visiting – Caritas Australia)*

Immersion experiences are often a positive life changing experience for participants. It is important that these immersions are equally as positive an experience for the host communities.

Continuous evaluation of our practices within these immersions will help to ensure that we are honouring the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). (To ensure integrity of the process, it is desirable that evaluations be completed by all stakeholders, including the host community.)

How we serve is exceedingly important

“International non-government organisations who work in the field of international aid and development, like Caritas, are constantly evaluating their approach to development in line with best practice research. We are challenged daily to review how we can continually improve the way that we work to end poverty, promote justice and uphold dignity.

The call to work for justice, in humility and solidarity, energises us to reach towards high standards of practice and a commitment to reflect on this practice.

Now, more than ever, students, teachers and schools are becoming increasingly engaged global citizens through robust global education curriculum in schools. In addition, there are many opportunities to travel to communities in developing countries.

For educators, creating service experiences that offer something more than simply providing a helping hand is challenging. The manner in which we undertake these activities impacts on the educational outcomes and goals for our students and schools.

The encounter with others and engagement in dialogue through participation in immersion is an opportunity to testify to the Catholic faith in words and actions while also learning about and from other cultures and traditions (including faith traditions). When engaging in dialogue, receptivity towards ‘the other’ is fundamental. It is important to really *meet* our fellow human beings, and this means to really *listen* to what moves their spirit.

It is also paramount to recognise how we honour the dignity of our brothers and sisters around the world who are living in poverty and with whom we stand in solidarity.” (*Caritas, “Just Visiting” resource*)

“Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, as the place we are approaching is holy: else we may find ourselves treading on someone’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.”

Max Warren, Maryknoll 1987

◆ Social Justice principles for consideration when engaging in an immersion experience:

- **Human Dignity**

“The dignity of **every** person, independent of ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability is the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching.” (Caritas CST)

- **Common Good**

The principle of the Common Good reminds each of us that we are all really responsible for each other, without restriction or exclusion and that we must work for social conditions which ensure that every person and every group in society is able to meet their needs and realise their potential.

- **Solidarity**

“Everyone belongs to one human family; everyone has an obligation to promote the rights & development of all peoples across communities, nations and the world, irrespective of national boundaries.” (Caritas CST)

- **Subsidiarity**

All people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Subsidiarity requires that decisions are made by the people closest to the issue.

- **Preferential option for the poor**

Preferential care should be shown to poor and vulnerable people. We are called to go the extra mile in relation to those in need.

REFERENCES

⇒ **Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC)**
www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching

⇒ **Justice and Peace Office**
<http://justiceandpeace.org.au/home/resources/catholic-social-teaching>

◆ Discussion Points for Principals/Leadership Teams/School Boards

- Does your school have documentation/policies that clearly articulate the purpose of an immersion experience and its link to the Catholicity of the school?
- Have you consciously checked the underlying paradigm or social construct that your school operates out of when engaging in immersion experiences? Examples:
- Positive paradigms: Servant leadership; Subsidiarity, set of values associated with your charism; Collaboration; Community development
- Negative paradigms: A desire to 'help'; White saviour; Guilt; Pity; Good PR Mileage;
- Is there a shared understanding of the underpinning paradigm / social construct in your school?
- How do you know?
- Is there equity of access to the immersion opportunity? How have you addressed this?
- Are all immersion participants and school leaders able to articulate?

“We do this because.....”

◆ Discussion Points for Staff and Students

- What is the difference between a school 'trip/camp' and an 'immersion experience'? List what you think are the differences.
- What might 'serving and supporting' look like during an immersion experience? What might it look like upon return? What shouldn't it look like? (Give examples)
- How is our school's immersion experience linked to our Catholic faith and the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching?
- How is our school's immersion experience linked to our curriculum? What learning outcomes are achieved?
- Is an immersion experience the best way to support these communities? If so, can you explain why? (***Consider environmental & social footprint of such an immersion; is it better NOT to go?***)
- What does it mean to respect someone else's dignity? Give some examples.
- How might you respect the dignity of a person from another community? Give some examples.
- What might constitute 'disrespectful' behaviour in a community we are visiting?

Prior to the immersion

Guiding questions and checklist

Partner Organisations:

- Have you done *due diligence* in relation to any organisation that you are partnering with for the immersion?
- Does this organisation engage in ‘for profit’ tourism?
- If it is a ‘for profit’ organisation, how does it help contribute to the wellbeing of the communities it visits?
- Are orphanages, boarding schools, refuges a part of their itinerary?
- Does this organisation subscribe to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism?
- Does this organisation have a proven track record of respectful, non-exploitative engagement with the communities it visits? How do you know?
- Do you know what ethical, environmental and social footprint this organisation leaves behind after they visit?

For a more substantive set of audit questions about partner organisations, see Pp. 22-27 of the “Ethical & Responsible Student Travel” audit tool developed by Save the Children & ALTO Global Consulting.

Ethical and Responsible Student Travel – Self Assessment Tool

School & Teacher Leadership:

(** See Caritas Cartoon at the end of this document as a discussion starter)

- Has the *rationale* for this immersion been clearly articulated to staff, students and the wider school community?
- Do participants understand the difference between a holiday, a school camp and a social justice immersion?
- Has the *link* between our Catholicity and the immersion been clearly documented? and articulated to and understood by your community?
- What *process* has been followed to ensure that participants are prepared spiritually, socially, psychologically and culturally to enter a new and different cultural environment?
- Have all Child Safe and other legislative requirements (including OH & S requirements & DFAT requirements) been met and circulated as required?
- Are all participants (& the wider community) clear about *expected behaviours* and a *culturally appropriate dress code* when engaging in an immersion experience?
- Have you checked that participants are appropriately skilled to perform expected tasks whilst on immersion?

Ethical and Responsible Student Travel – Self Assessment Tool (cont)

- Has the school developed an Emergency Response plan in the event of a critical incident during the immersion? Has this plan been widely circulated and understood? Who is the identified contact person back at your school who will handle all liaison in the event of a critical incident?
- If it is a new destination, has a member of the school's leadership completed appropriate due diligence work on this destination (i.e. 'been & seen')?
- Are there people within your own community who are from the same or similar cultural backgrounds as the community you are about to visit? E.g. Timorese children, Aboriginal children, Fijian children. How might this impact upon them? (e.g. to have their community seen as people who 'need help' or who are 'disadvantaged' or who are 'stereotyped in some way)

Student participants:

- Does the school have a documented and time-lined induction program specifically designed for students?
- Who are intending to participate in an immersion program?
- Does the induction program contain elements of: culture, politics, history, religious beliefs, geography, principles of CST?
- Who is responsible for development, oversight and delivery of this program? Have students been instructed on the Principles of CST and their application to immersion programs?
- Has the concept of 'service' been fully explored by participants?

During the immersion

The host community:

- Do we meet our hosts as equals?
- Do we understand the importance of suspending all judgement?
- Do we understand that participants are entering this community as 'learners' and not as people 'with the answers'?
- Do we set guidelines with participants about photographing members of the community where we are guests?
- Do we have a single designated photographer in our group whose photos will be the ones to be uploaded to be shared with the group / school webpage?

- Do we ask permission from a responsible adult in the host community if it's OK to take photographs?
- Are we depicting the people in our photographs in a dignified positive light?
- Is there agreement that photos of members of our host community will not be placed on social media?
- Is there agreement that the images of children in the host community will not be used in any promotional material or on social media?
- Do our interactions with the host community keep disruption to their daily routines to a minimum?
- If we give gifts to members of the community, have we asked the community what is their need? Can these gifts be purchased in the local (host) community? Will giving a gift to one person or one family create division within the community? Do our gifts leave an environmental footprint (eg non-recyclable single use items)?
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Students and the host community:

- Are students supervised at all times throughout their time in the host community?
- Are they supervised by appropriate personnel employed by the school?
- Is there opportunity for participants to re-connect at both ends of the day to pray, reflect, share experiences, seek clarification, seek support?
- Does the work that you are doing in your host community build on the work of previous visits from your school?
- Do interactions with the community contribute constructively to or align with the goals of the host community?
- Are opportunities available to debrief with participants during the program?
- What are the expectations for participants about sharing their private information such as phone numbers and other personal details with members of host communities?
- What are the expectations for participants about maintaining personal contact with members of the host community after the immersion?

 **After the visit**

- Is the immersion evaluated against stated criteria? Do recommendations result from this evaluation? Are recommendations used to help plan future immersions?
- Does the feedback include feedback from all stakeholders, including the host community?
- Who debriefs with the students / participants after the immersion, and is there a clear purpose to this debrief?

- Are opportunities available to continue the discussion about Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and to engage in social justice actions after the immersion?
- Are there opportunities for student/teacher participants to reconvene after the immersion to reflect, to raise or answer questions, to maintain connections?
- How will an ongoing commitment to global justice be evident in participants, ii) our community.
- How do teachers use their immersion experience to inform new classroom practice and with the student participants more broadly?

“If you’ve come here to help me, you’re wasting your time, but if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”
(Lilla Watson, Gangulu Woman, Australia)

Recommended further reading:

⇒ **Caritas Australia** - Just Visiting?

<https://www.caritas.org.au/learn/schools/just-visiting>

⇒ **Ethical & Responsible Student Travel** - A Self-Assessment Tool for Schools and Universities; from Save the Children & Alto Consulting

(Distributed to all SSPN participants, 2018)

⇒ **Tourism 4 Development**

#travelenjoyrespect

<http://www.tourism4development2017.org/travel-enjoy-respect/>



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"Just Visiting" Cartoon Illustrated by James Foley

