“Celebrating Community” in Catholic Education Week 2012 invites Catholic schools and education agencies to highlight and celebrate the value of “community” and affirm its presence as a central aspect of the life and strength of the Catholic Christian tradition.

“Community” is at the heart of the Catholic tradition. For two thousand years people have come together in community to share the story of Jesus, to nurture and strengthen each other, and to commit themselves to continuing his mission.

Our Catholic school philosophy embraces this sense of community, evidenced by the positive relationships which exist between families, parishes and schools.

Activities and programs that nurture and develop these life-giving relationships permeate the life of the Catholic school and enrich the learning environment in which students and staff operate.

True communities should also be outward focussed and recognise their valued partnerships with the wider community in a spirit of service and welcome.

Click here to read how the “community” theme for Catholic Education Week 2012 is reflected in the Catholic school and parish communities in Longreach and Clayfield, Brisbane.

**General Peter Cosgrove to Highlight Importance of ‘Community’ as Ambassador for Catholic Education Week 2012**

General Peter Cosgrove AC MC will share a message about the importance of community values when he tours Queensland as the official ambassador for Catholic Education Week celebrations from July 22-28 this year.

General Cosgrove will meet with various groups of Catholic school students, staff, parents and parishioners in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Brisbane highlighting the theme for Catholic Education Week 2012 - “Celebrating Community - Family Parish School”.

“While community and solidarity aren’t unique to Australia, they are something that we should continue to promote and celebrate,” General Cosgrove says. “I believe we have a great sense of community in Australia. Queenslanders will particularly resonate with the thought that sometimes a tragedy that impacts on the community will challenge that sense of community.

“I got to see the state after Cyclone Larry in 2006. I also saw the tragedy and the nobility of the community after the floods and cyclone last year. “This sense of community, cohesion, service before self, picking out who’s in need and going to them - people did it instinctively,” he said.
General Cosgrove says the Catholic faith is like a ‘glue binding communities together. “People of faith should rejoice in a strong sense of community and nurture these attitudes wherever they find them,” he said. “We should acknowledge that these values are not just ‘Australian’, they’re also Christian.

“Even those in our community who profess themselves to be without hope. We know that they are God’s creatures and they’re part of our community.

“I am honoured to have been invited to be the Ambassador for Catholic Education Week and I look forward to sharing some of my experiences with Catholic school communities around Queensland,” General Cosgrove said. Queensland Catholic Education Commission Executive Director Mike Byrne says the Commission is delighted that General Cosgrove accepted its invitation. “Catholic schools embrace the sense of community which General Cosgrove speaks of, evidenced by the positive relationships which exist between families, parishes and schools,” he said.

“Activities and programs that nurture these life-giving relationships permeate the life of the Catholic school and we believe enrich the learning environment in which students and staff operate. “True communities should also be outward-focussed and recognise their valued partnerships with the wider community in a spirit of service and welcome. “General Cosgrove’s strong Catholic faith, outstanding career, and in particular his well-known peace-keeping work in East Timor, and community rebuilding in Innisfail following Cyclone Larry, make him an ideal ambassador for this year’s celebrations,” Mr Byrne said.

General Cosgrove is currently the Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University and was Australian of the Year in 2001. He grew up in Sydney, attending primary school at St Francis Catholic School in Paddington and secondary school at Waverley College run by the Christian Brothers. General Cosgrove has spent a total of eight years living in Queensland at Townsville and Enoggera army bases. His elder sons attended Marist College, Ashgrove and youngest son attended St Joseph’s College, Gregory Terrace.

There are 292 Catholic schools in Queensland educating 138,000 or 1 in 5 Queensland students and employing more than 17,000 teachers and staff. It is great to know that Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School will join the Catholic Schools of Queensland for the 2013 celebrations as the 293rd school.

**New Category for Awards to Recognise Contribution to Reconciliation**

A new category recognising individuals making an outstanding contribution to the life of a Catholic education community in the area of Reconciliation has been introduced to the Queensland Catholic Education Commission’s annual Spirit of Catholic Education Awards.

The Aunty Joan Hendriks Spirit of Catholic Education Reconciliation Award has been named in honour of the recently retired Chair of the QCEC Indigenous Education Subcommittee who has made a significant contribution to strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Catholic education over many years.

Aunty Joan Hendriks is an Aboriginal Elder of the Ngugi people from Moreton Island and her roles across Church, state and national arenas have included Queensland Bishops’ nominee to the
National Catholic Education Commission and teacher at the Australian Catholic University.

She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Australian Catholic University in May for her contribution as an Indigenous Elder and educator in the field of Aboriginal education, reconciliation and justice for indigenous Australian peoples.

Aunty Joan’s passion for educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people continues in semi-retirement with her involvement as Cultural Awareness Project Officer and Elder in Residence at Lourdes Hill College, Brisbane.

The Spirit of Catholic Education Awards are presented annually in conjunction with Catholic Education Week to recognise staff members, parents, clergy or volunteers making an outstanding contribution to the life of Catholic school communities and Catholic education agencies in Queensland.

Other categories for nomination include initiating a program or activity in response to a need, leading and facilitating for change and improvement, striving for excellence in their work, and engaging in exceptionally life-giving relationships with students, colleagues or other members of the school community or Catholic education agency.

This year’s awards will be presented at the official launch of Catholic Education Week at The Little Flower Church, Kedron on Wednesday 25 July. All nominees for the awards will receive a certificate of recognition to be presented within their school communities.

The awards are proudly supported by the Queensland Teachers’ Mutual Bank (QTMB), the Australian Catholic Superannuation and Retirement Fund (ACSRF) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU), the sponsors of Catholic Education Week.