

**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ETHOS  
OF  
BRESCIA HOUSE URSULINE CONVENT SCHOOL  
BRYANSTON**

PART ONE

THE DISTINCTIVE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER  
OF  
BRESCIA HOUSE URSULINE CONVENT SCHOOL  
(known as BRESCIA HOUSE SCHOOL)

**1. Description of Brescia House School as a Catholic school**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School is a school community, recognized by the local bishop, which through its general programme of education and especially its Religious Education classes and religious practices, exercises the right to live and learn the values of Jesus Christ, as upheld by the Catholic Church. Brescia House School provides this values-based education for the Catholic community as well as for those from the wider community who seek an education in harmony with the aims of the school.

**As a Catholic school Brescia House School aims:**

to provide a challenging educational environment which integrates faith and culture;  
to promote the holistic growth of all learners;  
to give active witness to social concern and care for others.

**As a Catholic school, Brescia House School achieves this through:**

promoting a Catholic perspective of human life;  
a holistic approach to life;  
nurturing religious and moral formation;  
the dedication of the principal and staff to practising and promoting moral values and to a high standard of teaching and learning.

**As a Catholic school, Brescia House School strives towards:**

- 1.3.1 excellence in education, with outcomes embracing the total formation of each individual and involving a passion for the ministry of educating;
- 1.3.2 preparing learners to take their place in society as responsible citizens;
- 1.3.3 respect for the uniqueness of every person and for the integrity of creation;
- 1.3.4 a critical communication of culture, guided by a Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ whose life and teaching provide our model;
- 1.3.5 transmission of values for life through the integration of faith and culture and of culture and life;
- 1.3.6 nurturing of the faith of all members of the school community, recognizing that each is at his or her own stage of faith development;
- 1.3.7 encouraging and practising openness and dialogue between the various faith communities as a means of both education and spiritual formation and development;
- 1.3.8 respecting the differing religious identities, backgrounds and traditions of learners; helping all members of the school community to recognize and value what their different beliefs have in common as well as recognizing and respecting the differences between their own beliefs and those of others;
- 1.3.9 serving both the Catholic and the wider community with a concern for all people, especially the poor and marginalized;
- 1.3.10 working in partnership with parents – the primary educators of their children – the local church, the wider community and the organs of civil society, for the benefit of the community we serve and of society itself;
- 1.3.11 being a model of Christian freedom, justice and love in administration and teaching and in the relationships between educators, learners, parents and community.

## **2. Characteristics of Brescia House School**

### **2.1 A religious dimension to the School's life**

#### **2.1.1 Worship:**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School expresses its community identity and ideals in its worship: religious assemblies, key religious events and themes, feast-days and liturgical seasons are celebrated and prayer is built into the rhythm of school life.

#### **2.1.2 Solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged:**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School is particularly sensitive to the call for a more just society and it tries to make its own contribution towards its realization. This includes striving to put the demands of justice into practice in the daily life of the school. It also includes educating the learners to a sense of social responsibility and solidarity with the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized. In practice, this takes different forms, responding wherever possible to local needs in our concern and our outreach activities.

#### **2.1.3 Critical reflection:**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School takes time and trouble to evaluate its life against the challenges of its context, seen in both local and broader terms, and to confront influences that are hostile to human dignity. Both educators and learners are encouraged to acquire the skills of critical reflection and social analysis as helpful tools for the exercise of responsible citizenship.

### **2.2 Religious education**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School's curriculum includes a substantial and comprehensive Religious Education programme, the principles, truths and ethics of which permeate whatever the school does. This programme is life-centred, broad and multi-faceted, encompassing personal growth as well as moral formation and explicitly religious exploration and practice. The programme is consistent with the Religious Education Policy for Catholic Schools as approved by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. It is rooted in the Catholic tradition, the breadth of this tradition accommodating others from similar religious traditions. The right to religious freedom and freedom of conscience is respected; special arrangements can be made in consultation with parents. The Religious Education programme seeks to address all educational needs within a Catholic Christian framework. Catholic learners may be prepared for reception of the Sacraments by the school or ecclesial initiation may be left to the responsibility of learners' own families and Church communities, with the school complementing and facilitating the process. A learner leaving a Catholic school should have had, at the appropriate level, the opportunity for an experiential grounding in scripture, theology, morality, social justice and spirituality of a high educational standard.

### **2.3 Harmony with the values of the Catholic Church**

As a Catholic School, Brescia House School stands in solidarity with the Catholic Church, sharing in the mission of its Bishop as principal teacher of the local Church. Ultimately, the reason for the Catholic school's existence is to incarnate and teach Gospel values for the good of its members and of the broader community. To do this assumes freedom of conscience.

### **2.4 An understanding with each member of the school Community**

As a Catholic school, Brescia House School aims to be a community. All staff, as well as learners with their parents, freely choose to join, knowing what this community strives to be, what it offers and what it expects of its members. These things should be made known to all learners' families and all staff when they apply to join the school community. It should be understood that membership of the community depends on the honouring of these terms and that while the right to freedom of religion and conscience of each individual is respected, it would not be right and just to join the community simply for selected benefits seen in isolation from the school's total mission. It is not acceptable for any official, for staff, learners or parents to actively undermine the school's religious and moral values.

(Derived from: Handbook for Catholic Schools  
Catholic Institute for Education  
S.A.C.B.C.)

## PART TWO

### THE EDUCATIONAL VISION FOR BRESCIA HOUSE URSULINE CONVENT SCHOOL (BRESCIA HOUSE SCHOOL) OF THE URSULINE SISTERS OF THE ROMAN UNION OF THE ORDER OF ST URSULA, PROVINCE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, FOUNDERS OF THE SCHOOL.

An Inspiring Heritage derived from  
St Angela Merici, foundress of the Ursulines.

#### St Angela Merici

Angela Merici was born during the Renaissance (about 1474) in Italy. Captivated by Christ's love, generously open to the needs of others and a woman of prayer, she was sensitive to the critical social and spiritual needs of her times. She and her first companions consecrated themselves and their entire lives to God and his work. Angela's writings have given us the heritage of profoundly Christian principles of education that has been developed and enriched in Ursuline schools worldwide for the past four centuries and continue to be the living tradition of this richly endowed educational network. The foundresses, Ursuline Sisters, who have poured their energies and expertise into developing Brescia House School, shared and continue to share with Ursuline Sisters and with their lay collaborators here and throughout the world, the conviction that the educational vision of Angela Merici is an inspiring heritage, a living and proven model that answers the deepest needs of our times.

#### Three characteristics of Angela's thinking stand out for us in her writings:

- Caring,
- Strength in Unity,
- Relationships based on Love and Charity.

#### Caring

Angela wrote:

- *Willingly hold in consideration  
and have engraved on your mind and heart  
all your dear daughters, one by one;  
not only their names  
but also their condition, and character,  
and their every situation and state. (Second Legacy, 1-3)*
- *Be gentle and compassionate towards your dear daughters.  
and strive to act solely out of the sole love  
and out of the sole zeal for souls  
when you admonish and advise them,  
or exhort them to some good  
and dissuade them from some evil.  
For you will achieve more with kindness and gentleness  
than with harshness and sharp rebukes. (Second Precept 1-3)*
- *Above all, be on your guard  
not to want to get anything done by force,  
because God has given free will to everyone,  
and wants to force no-one,  
but only proposes, invites, and counsels. (Third Legacy, 8-11)*

Caring is an evangelical attitude that comes straight from “the loving kindness of the heart of our God” (Luke 1:78), implying a respect filled with trust in what God wants for each one of his children.

Angela’s profoundly human attitude of caring for those for whose education we are responsible, emphasizes the importance of meeting the other person on her own ground, of being aware of the spiritual, intellectual and material needs of each, in fact, of everything that concerns the individual in all her uniqueness, and of striving to understand her behaviour so as to discern in the light of each person’s dignity how best to guide each one to fulfilment in her God-given freedom of development.

To Angela, **caring** means a lively desire and pro-active self-commitment to see each person, even the apparently unpromising, blossom and be fulfilled according to her calling in every dimension of her being. This implies nurturing each person through the phases of growth, guiding her heart to focus on essentials so that she may become, in all her unique beauty, an independent human being capable of love and of openness to others and with the will to promote selflessly justice, peace and harmony in today’s world.

### Strength in Unity

Angela wrote:

- *See how important is union and concord.  
So long for it,  
pursue it,  
embrace it,  
hold on to it with all your strength;  
For I tell you:  
living all together united in heart,  
you will be like a mighty fortress,  
a tower of strength. (Last Counsel, 10-15)*
- *My last word to you  
is that you live in harmony,  
united together,  
all of one heart and one will. (Last Counsel, 1)*

These words enshrine for us the centrality of unity of heart and mind emphasized by Angela in all our educational endeavours, of willing the good of others, of being prepared to listen to one another, staff and pupils, of avoiding conflicts and divisions on the one hand, and on the other of seeing differences and diversities as opportunities for enrichment of the whole.

Unity manifests itself in the quality of the network of collegueship we form with one another, in our manner of relating to one another in everyday living, in maintaining occasions for rejoicing and celebrating together. Prayer and worship together lie at the heart of genuine unity.

This unity and harmony is not focused inward in any exclusive way but, on the contrary, creates the strength to reach out to the people of our area and beyond, especially the materially poor and those in any way needy and underprivileged, including all in a broad vision of and commitment to the common good.

Unity, in fidelity to the school’s Ursuline heritage, is one of its strongest pillars of Brescia House’s educational foundations.

## Relationships based on Love and Charity

- *Do your duty,  
correcting them with love and charity,  
and after that, leave it to God.  
He will do marvelous things  
in his own time, and when it pleases him. (Eighth Counsel, 7 and 9)*
- *You will achieve more with kindness and gentleness  
than with harshness and sharp rebukes..  
charity, which directs everything  
to the honour of God and the good of souls,  
teaches discretion ... (Second Counsel, Cf. 3 – 7)*

The model of genuine love and charity, as of authentic caring for others and of unity of heart and will, is drawn from God himself who loved us all first.

The love that infuses our heritage is strong and yet tender, both alert and discrete, and as selfless as a mother's love. It is a love that is based on esteem for each person, humble and attentive to everything concerning that person, alert to find ways to praise and encourage, vigilant of each one's dignity and freedom, confident and patient because respectful of God's plans for each one, concerned to create an educational environment that is favourable to growth in truly human values.

Only genuine love and charity, assimilated and personalized by those in positions of authority and responsibility, can give rise to judgments and attitudes appropriate for guiding those in our care in genuine growth in any given situation. All aspects of leadership are summed up for Angela in the biblical model of the servant-leader. She writes:

- *Learn from Our Lord  
who, while he was on earth, was as a servant ...  
He says, I am among you not as the one served,  
but as the one who serves. (First Precept, Cf. 6-7)*

## Conclusion

- *Have hope and firm faith in God,  
for he will help you in everything. (Counsels, Prologue)*

The Catholic Christian ethos of Brescia House Ursuline Convent School depends basically and entirely on its foundation of faith in Christ, his teaching and salvation. For, as is proclaimed by the school's foundation stone:

**Christ is our first Teacher** (Matth.)

And the motto of the Ursulines of the Roman Union, also inscribed on the foundation stones, affirms the same fundamental truth:

**For the Glory of God Alone,**

The Ursuline schools' motto, which applies to both pupils and staff, echoes again this assertion -

**SERVIAM**, I will serve God and my neighbour -

challenging each generation to keep growth in knowledge in the context of growth in faith, and so harvest the wisdom and life vision of the great tradition of Ursuline Catholic education to which Ursuline schools are privileged to belong.

(Quotations from the writings of St Angela Merici are from: **Earliest-known Italian Texts and Translation by a team of Ursulines of the Roman Union**, Rome 1995.)