



AQUINAS COLLEGE



A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT WELLBEING

Introduction

It is at the heart of the purposes of Aquinas College that its members experience an environment that is conducive to their development intellectually, psycho-emotionally, socially, physically and spiritually. Faithful to its identity as a Catholic institution, and to the intuitions of Marist founder Saint Marcellin Champagnat, Aquinas College is committed to nurture the growth of the young adults in its care. Beyond providing them with excellent accommodation, meals, security, and other basic services, the College offers experiences and programmes for students that seek to be educative, liberating and empowering, so that students can be optimally positioned to become critically aware, responsible and compassionate human beings.

Aquinas is both person-centred and communally-oriented in its structures, policies and pastoral approaches. It exists for the wellbeing and integral growth of its students, and for leading them to take their places responsibly, purposefully and compassionately in society.

The approach of Aquinas to the pastoral care of its students is underpinned by an essentially Christian anthropology that emphasises the fundamental goodness, dignity, and potential of all people. As an educational institution, it aims to *draw out (educare)* these dimensions that are innate in each of its students. As a Christian institution, it does this primarily through personal accompaniment, the communal dynamics of its collegiate life, and the promotion of Gospel-values as life-fostering paths for human happiness and fulfilment. Among such values are the cardinal virtues of faith, hope and love; these being lived out through generosity, compassion, self-discipline, fairness, harmony, respect and gratitude.

Following the methodology of Jesus, the College's pastoral strategies are invitational and dialogical: young people are invited into a critical and reflective dialogue with their world, with their immediate context, and with their own life experiences. They are led to understand their own worth and meaning in a socially responsible context.

Establishing a culture that fosters health and wellbeing

Inevitably, a residential and communal environment comprising two hundred young adults will generate an intense and impactful culture. Such a culture can be intensely good and growth-full at one end of the spectrum, or intensely toxic and harmful at the other. Aquinas self-consciously and strategically strives to build and sustain a culture that fosters wholeness and growth. For that to happen, the values of mutual respect, inclusiveness, forgiveness, and trust need to permeate and define its collegiate life.

The Christian worldview is that all people have both the right and the capacity

- to be loving, hopeful and fulfilled human beings,
- to create personal relationships, families and communities that are marked by mutual respect and trust,
- to live in in a society that is just and equitable.

At the same time, all people carry the wounds and damage of their life's journey: moments when trust has been betrayed, relationships broken down, or a sense of self-worth stunted or arrested. Such scarring can inhibit or misdirect people's growth to wholeness. The pastoral approach of Aquinas helps to educate its students

- to eschew any behaviours and attitudes that are likely to be harmful to others, and

- to promote relationships and ways of acting that lead people back to wholeness and healthiness.

The culture of the College is founded on this. A positive culture will be preventative and proactive, rather than responsive and reactive.

The College knows that it must, in the first place, do all it can reasonably do to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and morally safe. It needs to be somewhere where all can feel included, respected, and free from any pressure to be or do anything that is humiliating or harmful for them.

Second, the College seeks to be proactive in promoting wellbeing by providing programmes, experiences and organisational structures that help students to enhance their capacities and readiness to be responsible, empowered and integrated human beings, serving both their own interests and those of their fellow students.

Third, Aquinas offers students, through its Christian narrative and value-base, a way of discovering purpose and meaning in life, giving them both reason and means for faith, hope and love.

Holistic growth: a framework for nurturing wellbeing

For people to become faithful, hopeful and loving, they need to be personally healthy and integrated. They need a positive self-concept and need to have values, reasons, and achievable ways for living in healthy and productive ways. Confident and comfortable in their own skin, and in a community where they are accepted for who they are, they move forward in their own lives, in their interpersonal relationships, and in their world, with maturity and without having to exploit or use others to compensate for their own shortcomings or needs.

In pursuit of this end, Aquinas College adopts a holistic understanding of human wellbeing. It recognises that it is concerned with young people who are transitioning into the early years of their adulthood. While working with them as adults, it recognises that they are at varying stages of physical, emotional and social maturity. The College takes an integrated approach to helping them continue to develop physically, intellectually, psycho-emotionally, socially and spiritually.

It builds an environment, offers programmes and services, and sets expectations that will help them to be:

- **Physically** fit and healthy
- **Mentally** stimulated and resilient
- **Psycho-emotionally** maturing and integrated
- **Socially** connected and responsible, and
- **Spiritually** nurtured and inspired

This offers a conceptual framework for how Aquinas understands, supports and promotes the wellbeing of young adult students in a residential college situation.

This can be represented diagrammatically in this way:



The College generates its pastoral goals and strategies based on this integrated conceptual framework. It seeks to be a place that

- nourishes and supports personal growth
- educates and transforms students' understandings and skills, and
- enhances their capacities and readiness to live, relate and work in healthy and responsible way