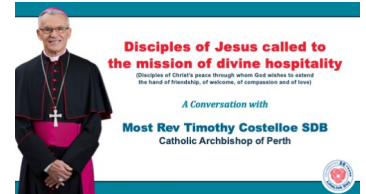




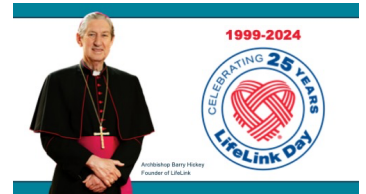
## Archbishop's 2024 Secondary Schools Forum Address



Good morning everybody.

I would like to begin my talk this morning by thanking you all for coming and joining us for this very important occasion, the annual secondary schools LifeLink Day.

**SLIDE 21** This year, as you have already heard, is very special because we are celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of LifeLink by Archbishop Hickey. This morning I want to both honour and thank Archbishop Hickey for this wonderful initiative which remains A lasting monument to his deep concern for the poor and needy here in WA and particularly, of course, in territory covered by the Archdiocese of Perth.



For all these years life link has been the coordinating body and the source of financial support for so many of our archdiocesan agencies which is really to say of course for all of those people who in one way or another have been helped are being helped and will be helped by the church here in WA through the generous people who work in our life link agencies.

Right from the beginning Catholic schools have been involved and committed to I'm very generous in the work of our life link agencies through the activities they undertake to raise money to support those most in need. I don't think there is any real need for me this morning to provide any further detailed information on the work of our particular agencies beyond what you have already heard or will hear throughout the course of the meeting.

If you want to know more or want to remind yourselves of the great work which our agencies do end of the way in which our schools assist them you could always visit our website.

Basically, of course, **SLIDE 22** our annual secondary schools LifeLink launch is really nothing more than an invitation to each one of us individually, and to all of us who in various ways are part of the work of Catholic Education here in Western Australia, to make sure that we never lose sight of those people in our society who are really in need, and that we take the time to stir up within ourselves the spirit of generosity and concern and the desire to do something practical to help these people.



This morning, though, what I want to do is to put these questions to you: Why is this so important? Why does this matter?

In a way, it is because we belong to the world of Catholic Education here in Western Australia that we would even think to ask this question. It is not, of course, that we would be the only people to ask this question - people of all religious faith and people who don't have any religious faith also ask this question. The reason for that, of course, is that any decent human being would ask this question; any decent human being would not be able to see the suffering and the despair and the hopelessness of other people and at least wonder whether he or she should be trying to do something about it.

Because it is the job of a Catholic School to help people grow into decent human beings, and because we believe that in Jesus Christ we have the very best model of a truly decent human being who has ever lived, it makes sense and indeed is essential, that these questions should be front and centre in a Catholic school, or a Catholic Hospital, or a Catholic parish or any other Catholic institution or agency. We couldn't really call ourselves Catholics otherwise.

This morning, then, what I really wanted to invite us all to think about is this: What does it mean to be a decent human being? What does it look like in practice?

**SLIDE 23** And maybe, from these two questions, a third question might occur to us? Is there something I need to do as an individual person and is there something that we need to do as members of all the different groups to which we belong: family, school, sports club, neighbourhood, workplace, in order to help each of us to be decent human beings? And is there some solid ground, some basic convictions, upon which I can rely to keep me on track in the effort to be the best human being I can be?



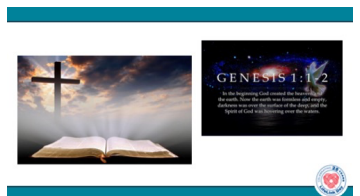
For people of faith, and certainly for the great majority of you here today who are Christians and many of you Catholic Christians, this question can be expressed in another way:

**SLIDE 24** Can we live our lives in such a way as to be faithful to God's plan for us in giving us the gift of life in the first place? Does God who created us, who called us into life, and who asks us to live our life here in this place and in this time in history, have a plan for us? Could it be that the life God has given us as a gift is also a task God has given us to fulfil?



When Christians, whether they belong to the Catholic Church or to other Churches, ask these kinds of questions, one of the places they go to in order to search for answers is the Bible.

**SLIDE 25** For Christians, of course, the Bible is in two parts: what we call the Old Testament which is perhaps better called the Jewish or Hebrew Scriptures, and the New Testament, which tells the story of Jesus. Jewish people, when they ask these very same questions, focus on the Old Testament and of course other religions will have their own ways of delving into these questions. For Christians, and for the Jewish people into whom Jesus himself was born, the first place to go is the first book of the Jewish Scriptures, of the Old Testament: the Book of Genesis.



If we go to the very first sentence of the very first chapter of the very first book in the collection of books which make up the Old Testament, we find these words: *In the beginning, God created the heaven and the Earth.*

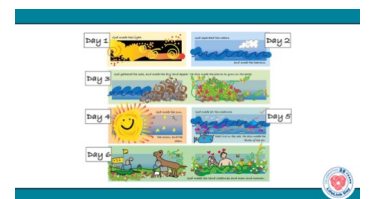
What then follows, as many of you would know, is what we call the Story of Creation. I am going to read a section of it for you in a moment, but I just want to point out that these words were written many thousands of years ago by people who had great faith in God - but who did not have access to the scientific knowledge we have today. As we read this story or listen to this story, then, it would be a mistake to read it as if it were coming out of a scientific textbook.

We should read it as an expression of the deep faith of people who did not know much about science but who knew a great deal about God. These days, of course, the opposite can often be true. There are lots of people today who know a great deal about science, but very little about God. I would like to think that we could be people who know about both!

For the moment, then, don't worry about whether or not God made the world in seven days of 24 hours each. Instead, concentrate on what kind of God the first chapter of this book is talking about? So let's listen very carefully.

## **SLIDE 26**

### ***Read from the Bible***



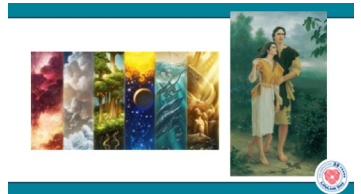
When I was a teenager still in secondary school back in Melbourne, I had already thought about becoming a priest, and so I thought it would be the right thing to do to try and help out in any way I could in my local parish. One of the things I was asked to do was to teach Catechetics, religious education, to the younger kids who came to Mass on Sundays with their families, but who didn't go to Catholic schools and so did not have the opportunity for regular religious instruction during the school day.

I have often thought back to those days and imagined myself reading the story I have just read to you to the kids sitting in front of me and then asking them – and remember these particular kids would have all still been in primary school - what kind of God was being talked about in this story of creation.

I'd like to just pause for a moment and ask you to think about the same question. What kind of God is being described in this story? The answer doesn't have to be too sophisticated too complicated. In fact, it should be very simple. Let me put it to you this way: if you had to describe in just a few simple words to a child what kind of God is being talked about in the story we have just listened to, what would you say?

I know what I would say. I would say that this story is telling us about a God who makes things. And of course, if you look at the order in which God makes things, God starts in a sense with the big things - the stars, the sun, the moon, the sky, the land - but then moves on to making living things - the birds of the air, in the fish of the sea, the wild beasts which roam the face of the Earth, all the **living** things - and then, right at the end, after God has made everything else, and as you heard everything God made was good, God makes us

**SLIDE 27** - he makes human beings - and when God makes human beings, and **only** when God makes human beings, God makes them - makes us- in God's image and likeness. It is only us - human beings - young ones, old ones, strong ones, weak ones, smart ones, foolish ones, brave ones, frightened ones, healthy ones, sick ones, all human beings - he makes us in the divine image, in the image of God.



And then God says something else, something very important, something very special: God says to us: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.

Can you see what is happening? God makes absolutely everything that exists. God is responsible for everything that exists: the universe, countless galaxies, the billions of stars, the endless number of planets, our own earth and everything on the earth.

We are told that everything. God makes is good. But it is only us, human beings, who are made in the image of the God who makes things; in the image of the God who gives life to everything that lives, and who then tells us to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It is as if God is saying to us who are made in his image: Just as I give life so you too must give life. I am the life-giver and because I have made you in my image - in the image of the life-giver - you will be who you are supposed to be if you too are a giver of life - and the opposite of course is also true: you will not be who you are supposed to be, who God created you to be, if you are a taker of life, a destroyer, or someone who diminishes and damages the life of another. This is the solid ground, the conviction and the belief, that can anchor us and enable us to keep on the right track as we try to become the best, most decent human beings we can be.

Our LifeLink agencies **SLIDE 28** exist in order to help us, as people who in one way or another are part of the life and mission of the Catholic Church, be givers of life, especially to those whose own experience of life is so much less than it could be or should be.



There are so many people whose experience of life is marked by despair rather than by hope, by loneliness rather than by friendship, by rejection and abandonment rather than by love and acceptance.

Every time we do something which lifts a person up, which gives their life meaning, which brings a smile to their face and joy to their heart, we are being life-givers and we are being true to the plan God had for us in giving us the gift of life in the first place. There simply is no better way to be faithful to our deepest God-given identity as human beings and then for the majority of us as Christians, than to be generous with our time, with our talents, and with all the good things we have and enjoy, to enrich the lives of others.

In the end, it really is as simple as deciding each day to be on the lookout for ways in which we can do something good for someone else. And one of the ways - not the only way but one of the ways - we can decide to do this is to provide whatever help we can to those who are already doing it and who perhaps are doing it full-time either as volunteers or as Church workers. Many of these people are involved in our LifeLink Agencies and they need our encouragement and our support.

If today **SLIDE 29** each group of you who are here from one of our Catholic schools here in the Archdiocese of Perth can put your heads together and, first of all, make a commitment to doing something to raise money for LifeLink and then share your energy and creativity in coming up with activities and projects that will encourage other people to get involved, then you will be living out the identity that God gave you when he gave you the gift of life and planted deep within you the identity of being a life giver in the image of God, who is the great life giver.



This, of course, is exactly one of the things for which our so far one and only canonised saint, St Mary of the Cross Mackillop, is remembered:

**SLIDE 30** her famous saying – never see a need without doing something about it. For us to be like this, for us to be real life-givers to those in need - we need to have eyes that are open to seeing the needs around us; ears that are open to hearing the cries of God's needy people: and hearts that are big enough for those in need to find a place in our lives.



This is my hope for all of you today; this is the source of my gratitude and admiration for all those who since LifeLink's beginnings have been people with open eyes and ears and great big hearts; this is my prayer for the future of our Catholic schools, our Catholic Church here in WA, and our wider society.

And so, to bring this to a conclusion I ask you to enthusiastically support my LifeLink Day initiative and help raise a minimum of \$120,000 for people in need in the community this year.

I officially launch LifeLink Day 2024 for secondary schools and extend to you this Blessing.

### **Archbishop to offer Blessing.**

My best wishes and thanks to the principals, teachers and students throughout the Archdiocese, as you embark on **your** LifeLink Day”.

### **SLIDE 31**

Let's all be life-givers: this is what God has made us to be!

