The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA) 2016 Tom Ffrench Awards for Family Engagement in Catholic Education SA were announced during Catholic Education Week in May 2016.

The awards, named in honour of Tom Ffrench who was one of the founding members of the Federation, were previously called the Family School Partnership Awards and last year were re-launched as Awards for Family Engagement in Catholic Education.

This new focus reflects a more contemporary understanding of family engagement in learning and schooling as articulated in the Family, School and Community Partnership Bureau’s definition:

*In the schooling context, parental engagement is an intentional and collaborative strategy to support and leverage the knowledge, capacities and social capital of families to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people.*

The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA) is committed to lead and support parent and family engagement in learning and schooling and these awards are dedicated to showcasing and celebrating examples of leading practice that supports effective family engagement in Catholic schools in South Australia.

There are four award categories that recognise leading practice across four levels of influence and impact - sector or school wide, teacher driven or parent led.

The **Sector Recognition Award** recognises work led by the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS) and/or Catholic Education Offices of South Australia to drive the development of sector wide policy and practice that aims to strengthen family engagement in learning and schooling.

The 2016 Sector Recognition Award was presented to the Catholic Education Office’s Religious Education Team. The award is in recognition of the work, led by consultant Teresa Hudson, to develop a partnership with the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities to build the capacity of schools to engage families more effectively in the Made in the Image of God (MITIOG) Human Sexuality Program for SA Catholic schools.

This partnership recognises that families provide a child’s first, ongoing and most significant experience of love, faith and learning and in the area of human sexuality our Catholic schools are called to support families in this primary role.

In 2015, Teresa collaborated with the Federation to gain a broader understanding of effective family engagement in learning and schooling and, more specifically, to gain a better understanding of parents’ experience of MITIOG including what opportunities were offered to engage in the program and how this could be strengthened.

This included active participation in the Federation’s 2015 conference: Parent Engagement in Action, a focus group session with members of the Federation Council and collaborating with the Federation to develop a professional learning session for MITIOG Key Teachers on effectively engaging families in the Made in the Image of God program.
The **School Award** recognises a school community that has committed to a whole of school approach to strengthen family engagement in learning and the life of the school community.

The 2016 School Award was presented to Nazareth Catholic College for its whole school commitment to: *Building a Culture of Excellence with the Nazareth 5 Habits of Excellence.*

Regular attendance, punctuality, application, work completion and involvement in community are observed in the actions and behaviour of students who achieve excellence.

At Nazareth, school leaders set out to partner with families to create a culture of excellence by adopting the Nazareth Five Habits of Excellence as a ‘roadmap’ to success.

The systemic integration of the Five Habits of Excellence as a driver for success relies on a strong partnership with families to promote the habits and a shared responsibility between home and school to support all learners – from the early years to senior secondary - to practice these habits to realise their full potential.

The ultimate test of success has been Nazareth’s consistently strong Year 12 results since the Five Habits of Excellence were integrated into the culture of the Nazareth community including 100% SACE completion, an increase in the percentage of ATAR scores above 90 and an increase of grades in the A, B and C bands.

The **Class Award** recognises a class, subject or care group teacher who uses innovative and effective strategies for engaging parents and families in their children’s learning.

The 2016 recipient of the Class Award is St Martin De Porres School’s Sarah Bull who co-ordinates the school community’s *Community Garden Project: In Response to Laudato Si* — a family-school-parish partnership to engage families in the set-up, propagation and market activities of its community garden.

The whole of community project, not only responds to Pope Francis’ call to our Catholic schools and parish communities to care for our world, but connects the learning at home and at school as it relates to so many elements of the curriculum including Religious Education, science, health, maths, history.

The **Parent Leadership Award** recognises a parent group or parent demonstrating effective leadership of the school’s parent community to drive stronger family engagement in children’s learning.

The 2016 recipient of the Parent Leadership Award is St Mary Magdalene’s volunteer and School Board member, Carol Major.

Carol is a grandmother of children enrolled at the school who, with hearing dog Gertie a constant by her side, selflessly and tirelessly brings her passion, skills and life experiences to lead the school’s *Connect, Share, Learn and Give* project.

This project, enriched by Carol’s (and Gertie’s) presence and interaction, has helped to break down barriers between home and school in many ways and created a beautiful and exciting place of learning in the library for all members of the community and a welcoming place for families to connect, share and learn in the adjacent Parent Space.

Each recipient received a framed certificate with Nazareth Catholic College receiving $1,000 and St Martin De Porres and St Mary Magdalene’s receiving $500 each to support future initiatives that build parental engagement in their school communities.

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