

1987-2012

# Catholic Schools – Faith in our Future

Association of Management of  
Catholic Secondary Schools

Edited by  
Maedhbh Uí Chiagáin

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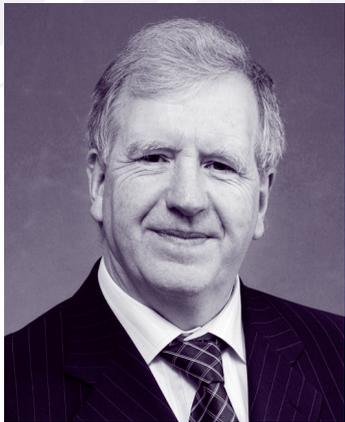
Association of Management of  
Catholic Secondary Schools

Emmet House · Miltown · Dublin 14

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# Focal ón Uachtarán



*Whither Catholic voluntary secondary schools?*

*As we celebrate the 25th birthday of the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools and given the extraordinary times we live in, surely it is an apt question.*

This collection of essays has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, its publication is surely an ideal way to mark 25 years of the Association, with articles from people involved at all levels in Catholic education. It is fitting that we should do so given the role the Association has played in the developing story which is Irish education since 1987. In many ways, of course, we are marking not just 25 years of AMCSS but also the many years of service to our schools by the various management organisations which predated the AMCSS.

However, this book has a further serious purpose which can be summed up in the word 'challenge'. And the challenge is indeed a significant one in the Ireland of 2012. But it is also an exciting one. With State policy so strongly in favour of plurality of provision, never before have we been so challenged to discern what our schools stand for and what they have to offer the parents of Ireland. How do they fit in with the mission of the Church and how do they serve the common good? Where do we fit in the European context? How effective is the leadership in our schools? How do we support that special leadership which should be a hallmark of a faith school? And where do we go from here?

But to return to the first aim of this collection – the celebration of 25 years of the Association. Scanning over the history of our schools, given the fragmented nature of the representation of voluntary secondary schools at national level up to the 1960s, great credit is due to those who strove to bring the various groups together as one cohesive body. The formation of the Joint Managerial Body as far back as 1964 was an inspired move, bringing together the two traditions of faith education in the State. The formation of the Catholic Managerial Committee in 1966, followed by the Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS), were important milestones along the way. Another milestone was the establishment of the Secretariat in 1971.

Finally, the decision was made in 1987 to form the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools. The association with its regional structure, strong Secretariat and Annual Conference has remained a key player and advocate for the voluntary sector. The importance of its negotiating role through JMB cannot be underestimated.

As it happened, the Association came into being following the agreement on the setting up of Boards of Management and when the change to lay principalship was just beginning. The loyalty of its members, especially its principals, to the Association at regional level has been tremendous. However, a challenge remains

in securing greater involvement of the Chairpersons of the Boards in the work of the Association. The Councils of Management have been blessed by the calibre of those who have been nominated by the Regions to Council. The unity of purpose and the selfless commitment of all those who have sat on Council have served all our schools well.

We should also note the wonderful and central role which the Secretariat fulfils in supporting our schools. The leadership of all of our General Secretaries and the unstinting work of the advisory and secretarial staff have been without equal. As stand-alone schools with very limited resources, without the support of the Council and Secretariat, our schools would scarcely have survived.

Over the past 40 years, the landscape of provision of second-level education has changed considerably. No new voluntary secondary school has opened in years. In numerical terms, there has been a drop from 493 to 385 voluntary secondary schools over the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. (It must be noted, however, that in many instances, the closing schools had amalgamated into Community Schools.) Other sectors have been better resourced and have seen their strategies for expansion meet with much success. At one level then, the future may seem bleak. But there is another side to the story. The major challenge which threatened all our schools since the 1970s was the withdrawal of religious from daily involvement in our schools and the fall-off in religious vocations. It is a great tribute to the Congregations and to the Irish bishops that this challenge has been met. The setting up of Boards of Management and the appointment of lay-principals has already been mentioned. The establishment of the various Trusts has been a fundamental and necessary step to allow our schools continue as voluntary secondary schools. In addition to the legal framework, the Charters of the various Trusts provide a guiding light for our school communities for the future.

The recent setting up of the Catholic Schools Partnership with the central aim of being a single voice for Catholic education will be seen in future as an important milestone in our schools' history. Already, the Partnership is beginning to focus on a strategy for the future of voluntary secondary schools. So let's not underestimate these many achievements as we look to the future.

However, our energies must now focus on ensuring that our existing schools reflect the ideals of Catholic education in their daily lives and that their rightful place in the educational landscape of Ireland is secured. It has to be accepted, however, that these aims will not be realised without a proactive approach by those of us

involved with the Catholic voluntary schools. If the argument for the existence of our schools is based on the constitutional rights of parents, we need to articulate clearly our vision for the schools in a language which parents, students and the wider community can share and articulate for themselves.

It is in this context that this publication is so timely. Our contributors have given us a rich series of essays, each of which adds to our understanding of where we are, what we are about and what we aspire to be in the future. On behalf of AMCSS, I wish to thank each one of our writers for their work in preparing their contribution and for the remarkable wisdom evident in each essay.

Ba mhaith liom focal buíochais ar leith a ghabháil le Maedhbh Uí Chiagáin agus leis an gcoiste comhairleach. Mar eagarthóir, rinne Maedhbh éacht. Bhailigh sí le chéile grúpa scríbhneoirí iontacha agus chuir sí leabhar suimiúil agus spreagúil ar fáil dúinn. Ba mhaith liom freisin buíochas a ghabháil le Ferdia Kelly, ár n-Ard-Rúnaí, an duine a spreag an leabhar seo ar dtús.

I trust that readers will find the contributions interesting and challenging and a valuable contribution to the journey of the voluntary school sector.

NOEL MERRICK *President AMCSS*



## Council of Management 2012-2014

1. row Fr. Paul Connell · Bernadette Kinsella · Sr. Ena Quinlan · Noel Merrick · Ferdia Kelly · Tony Lee
2. row Br. Cormac Commins · Mary Reaney · Sr. Canice Hanrahan · Lil Bruen · Grainne Friel · Paul Meany · John Mulvihill
3. row Ray McHugh · Ned O'Callaghan · Teenie Geraghty · John Curtis · Suzanne Thorn · Jean Pound · Arthur Godsil
4. row Martin Duggan · Chris Woods · Margaret Lennon · Robert McCarthy · Pat McEvoy
- absent Joe Whyte · Paddy Hogan · Bishop Brendan Kelly · Ian Coombes

FERDIA KELLY

# Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools in Ireland – The Challenges for the Future



*'In conversation with all our partners in education, we will ensure that the schools themselves and supporting structures remain effective, relevant and true to the authentic vision of the Catholic school for our times.'*

*Vision 08 · Pastoral Letter*

In Vision 08 – a Pastoral Letter on a Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland – the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference expressed a desire for

*‘...a fruitful dialogue about the best way of ensuring that Catholic schools can develop in the coming decades. We are convinced that this can only happen on the sure foundation of remaining faithful to the Gospel we serve while, at the same time, scrutinizing the signs of the times, as these signs emerge in the needs and demands of the larger national and international community to which we belong. In this way, in conversation with all our partners in education, we will ensure that the schools themselves and supporting structures remain effective, relevant and true to the authentic vision of the Catholic school for our times.’*

This invitation to engage in ‘fruitful dialogue’ is central to this essay with a particular focus on Catholic voluntary secondary schools. The Bishops’ Conference statement that the future of Catholic schools lies in the ‘sure foundation of remaining faithful to the Gospel’, is to be welcomed as it provides a solid bedrock against which to face an uncertain future.

### Key Challenges for Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools

The following are some of the key challenges being faced by Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Ireland:

- Decline in the number of Catholic voluntary secondary schools - parts of the country have no Catholic voluntary secondary schools
- Absence of new Catholic voluntary secondary schools - no new green field schools established in the past twenty years
- Major viability issues for some schools – curricular and financial
- Emergence of new Trusts – the challenge to develop and fund such structures
- Absence of clearly stated vision and strategy for Catholic education at national level
- Secularisation – the debate on the place of religion in the public square and especially in areas such as education
- Government policy

- Parental choice now and into the future
- Developments in teaching and learning especially in the context of the rapidly increasing influence of information technology.

### Decline in Number of Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools - Parts of Country with No Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools

The table below clearly highlights the falling numbers of voluntary secondary schools with a decrease of over one hundred such schools in the past twenty years. It has to be acknowledged that the majority of schools lost to the voluntary sector re-emerged as community schools or colleges as a result of amalgamations. Nevertheless, the impact of this decline in voluntary secondary schools means that there are now areas of this country where there is no Catholic voluntary school available to parents. The school transport scheme provides support for parents from minority religious traditions who desire faith based education, but to date no such facility is available to parents from a Catholic background.

### Number and Type of Schools at Post-Primary Level 1989 V 2009

	1989/1990		2009/2010	
	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils
Vol. Sec. Schools	493	213,788	384	185,006
V. E. C.	252	85,205	254	54,425
C. & C.	63	40,139	92	111,256
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>339,132</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>350,687</b>

The fact that no new green field Catholic voluntary secondary school has been opened in this country in the past twenty years combined with the above programme of rationalisation, means that in the area of second level education in this country the position has now been reached that Voluntary or denominational schools make up just over 50% of the total with the state sector, represented by Vocational and Community/Comprehensive schools, making up the other 50%.

It is a historical fact that at second level in Ireland voluntary secondary education has emerged in the guise of denominational schools, with schools in the state sector being typically multi-denominational. However, it must be clearly stated that voluntary schools, although denominational in character, are inclusive in practice. Just as a debate has commenced in relation to the patronage of primary schools very much based on the desire for greater diversity of provision, it is important that a debate emerges immediately on the future direction of the post-primary sector where such diversity already exists. If this issue is not addressed as a matter of urgency, there is a real danger that the reality of provision of school types at post-primary level will see parental choice limited to state schools in parts of the country, with parents in these areas who desire to have their children educated in the Catholic faith tradition failing to have their wish fulfilled.

### Major Viability Issues for some Schools – Curricular & Financial

In rural Ireland in particular, many Catholic voluntary schools are small and in a number of cases stand alone. With a series of very severe reductions in the allocation of both teachers and finance to schools in successive national budgets from 2009 to 2012, many schools have been forced to reduce their curriculum. Parents and pupils are rightly concerned about ensuring that the broadest possible choice of subjects and programmes is available in the school of their choice. When parents hear that subjects and programmes are no longer available in their local school they begin to look at alternatives for their children no matter the inconvenience that this may cause. Budget cuts using Pupil Teacher Ratios as the means to achieve such cuts in staffing in schools is a very blunt instrument. As a society in Ireland we need to address the reality that we are, in the name of austerity, creating a scenario where tracts of the Irish countryside will have no voluntary secondary school. Is this the type of society we want, where children are forced to spend long hours being transported long distances out of their local school community where each pupil is known and cherished as a unique human being?

The issue of financial viability for voluntary secondary schools is even more acute as a result of the historical under funding of this sector vis-à-vis the other two post-primary sectors. As a consequence of the introduction of the Free Education Scheme in 1967, voluntary secondary schools received a lower level of state support. This happened as a result of the state identifying the extraordinarily generous contribution of the religious to teaching and managing secondary schools at the

time. In other words, the state decided that the contribution of the religious in Catholic secondary schools allowed for the state to make a lower contribution to the running of these schools.

Voluntary secondary schools receive significantly lower funding than other second-level schools. As a matter of justice, the Department of Education and Skills should seek to equalise funding for all schools. Most people do not realise that schools in the Catholic secondary sector are severely disadvantaged in terms of annual grant support vis-à-vis the other two post-primary sectors. It is generally acknowledged that a Catholic secondary school of 400 pupils receives €90 per pupil less per annum in grants from the state than a similarly sized community school and €212 per pupil less than a 400 pupil vocational school. On average over 30% of total annual expenditure in a Catholic secondary school must be raised through fund-raising in the local community. In the current economic crisis such levels of fund-raising by charitable and voluntary organisations are not sustainable. It places a huge burden on school management, made up mainly of volunteers who give willingly of their time and expertise, and in turn reduces the time available for all of the other responsibilities that boards of management must undertake. In particular, there are serious concerns about the workload carried by principals in Catholic secondary schools as a result of the absence of management and administrative supports exacerbated by recent cuts in funding.

### Emergence of New Trusts – The Challenge to Develop & Fund such Structures

Apart from a small number of schools owned and managed by lay people, Catholic voluntary secondary schools emerged under the trusteeship of religious congregations and in the case of diocesan schools, the local bishop. Just as the religious congregations displayed great foresight and wisdom in embracing the opportunities provided by the Free Education Scheme in 1967, a similar level of vision and wisdom was evident in the 1980s when the decision was taken to appoint boards of management, made up mainly of lay people, to manage the schools. At the same time the appointment of lay principals commenced in the schools.

Having successfully introduced boards and lay principals, the religious congregations in the past ten years, through the visionary leadership of CORI, led the movement to introduce lay Trust Boards to ensure the continuity of the trusteeship of the network of Catholic voluntary secondary schools. Catholic

voluntary secondary schools are now in the main owned and managed by lay people, with those who act as directors of the Trust Boards and members of boards of management giving of their time and commitment on a voluntary basis.

As a matter of justice, the Government should seek to equalise funding for all post-primary schools and it should provide funding to support the trusteeship of voluntary secondary schools in the same way the trusteeship and management of the post-primary schools in the other two sectors are supported.

Aside from the important funding and support issues, a major challenge faces Catholic voluntary schools in relation to the development of appropriate structures for the future trusteeship and management of these schools. Questions such as the following must be tackled in order to provide for the future of the schools in the sector:

- Has the sector a clear sense of purpose and identity?
- What is the most appropriate trusteeship structure? A view has been expressed that all Catholic voluntary schools should come under one trust.
- Has each Catholic voluntary secondary school a clear sense of its identity and purpose? Is this identity and purpose shared by the whole school community? If not, what is happening in each school community to ensure a shared sense of identity and purpose?
- At national level, is there a clear vision for the sector? What will the sector look like in fifteen or twenty years time? Are questions like the number and location of Catholic voluntary secondary schools being discussed and decided? Is a programme of rationalisation being developed where it is decided that one or more of the existing schools are no longer viable in their current existence?
- Are new structures and models for the provision of Catholic secondary education being explored? Does Catholic education have to take place in schools owned by Catholic trustees? Should the focus be more on what takes place within the school community, i.e. the enterprise, rather than the building which could be leased from the state?
- What is the faith relationship between home – parish – school? Where and how can this relationship be improved?

### Absence of clearly stated vision and strategy for Catholic education at national level

In the light of the questions raised above in relation to the future provision and governance structures for Catholic voluntary secondary education, it is timely to seek a commitment at national level towards the development of a vision and strategic plan for the sector. The emergence of the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) under the auspices of the Episcopal Conference and CORI in addition to the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) gives hope for the development of such a strategy.

However, there must be no delay in developing this strategy. The future of the sector is dependent on fundamental questions being asked in relation to the future, otherwise parents who wish their children to receive an education in a Catholic faith-based environment in the future will be denied the opportunity.

The outcome of the process of developing such a strategy for the future will be challenging for many school communities, as witnessed by the experience of a similar process in Northern Ireland. However, this challenge cannot be shirked and must, in the first instance, be undertaken by the sector itself, so that interactions with Government and the other education partners can take place from a position where the Catholic sector has a clear strategy.

### Secularisation – the debate on the place of religion in the public square and especially in areas such as education

Both internationally and nationally, the challenge of secularisation in society is posing serious questions for faith based education. International experience suggests that even in the most secular societies in the western world faith based education is still very much appreciated. For example almost two-thirds of schools in Holland are privately as distinct from state owned and 90% of these privately owned are faith based.

It is accepted that here in Ireland greater diversity of provision of education is required at primary level. A serious debate on how this might happen has developed with some extreme views being expressed. At one extreme it is suggested that religion has no place in the public space including schools and at the other extreme there is a desire to maintain the status quo.

Catholic voluntary secondary schools have a place in the Ireland of the future. The schools have shown themselves to be open to change and have responded positively and proactively to the changes in Irish society. Catholic secondary schools are socially and educationally inclusive having actively responded to the policy of mainstreaming pupils with special educational needs. Likewise, the influx of large numbers of international pupils has led to Catholic secondary schools being to the forefront in developing good practice in welcoming these pupils and including them in the life of the school.

## Government Policy & Parental Choice

Government policy in Ireland must focus on diversity of provision of education. The Constitution places parents in the role of the primary educator of their children. The Education Act 1998 has parental choice as one of the core principles.

Government policy must continue to reflect and support parents in the provision of an education for their children. The Catholic voluntary secondary sector must also place parents and their hopes for their children at the centre of the education enterprise. It is important to appreciate that parents want what's best for their children. Each Catholic voluntary secondary school needs to clearly define its identity. As mentioned earlier, at the core of this identity must be faithfulness to the Gospel, developed through such core characteristics as recognising the dignity of the human person, in an inclusive community, in the service of the common good, with knowledge sought and respected and a faith that is nurtured and challenged.

Having developed this clarity of identity a school must ensure that all policies and practices in the school are underpinned by this identity or characteristic spirit. This identity must be clearly developed and promoted within the broader school community. In particular a sense of what the school stands for must be shared with all members of the school community. This process is essential and must be continuous so that there is clarity at all times as to the purpose of the school.

## Developments in Teaching & Learning especially in the Context of the Rapidly Increasing Influence of Information Technology

The above challenges for Catholic voluntary secondary schools are presented in the context of the core purpose of schools, the promotion of quality teaching and

learning. The world of the web, social media and rapidly developing technology are presenting society at large and education in particular with the new challenge of re-imagining teaching and learning. After a period of complacency when we told ourselves that we had a world class education system, we now find many questions being asked about the appropriateness of the education enterprise for the current generation of young Irish people. Declining PISA test outcomes allied to a drop in the number of pupils opting for science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) has resulted in an urgent debate as to the future direction of our education policy especially at post-primary level. Concerns have also been expressed at the lack of coherence in the approach to teaching and learning across the continuum from primary through to third level.

Catholic secondary schools have shown a willingness to embrace change and to ensure that quality teaching and learning is available to the pupils who attend the schools. This spirit of innovation and development of the education enterprise will be tested in the future as the evolution of information technology creates an environment to which teaching and learning must respond.

## Conclusion

We live in an age of great social, cultural and economic change. All the old certainties are being challenged to the core. Rapid developments in technology are placing even greater pressures on society and on schools in particular.

Faith schools are being challenged to re-visit what they stand for and to clearly articulate this core purpose within their school communities. Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Ireland have served previous generations of young people and their parents well. However, many new challenges face these schools if they are to continue to provide this quality of service to pupils and parents. Many searching questions must be asked and answered at both national and local levels. It behoves all involved in the enterprise of Catholic education to engage in this dialogue in order to 'ensure that the schools themselves and supporting structures remain effective, relevant and true to the authentic vision of the Catholic school for our times'.

FERDIA KELLY General Secretary AMCSS

NED PRENDERGAST

Ned Prendergast taught for a quarter of a century at Marian College Ballsbridge, before joining the Marino Institute of Education, where he was best known for a project entitled *'Reimagining the Catholic School.'* He is a widely travelled speaker on faith and education and in recent years a frequent contributor to *The Furrow*. Since 2007 he has been Director of Faith Development with CEIST, a trust body for Catholic voluntary secondary schools.



## What is Loved Survives

In one of his collected essays in *Love of the World*, John McGahern tells us: 'All that survives does so by acquiring lovers'.<sup>1</sup> Where does a statement like that leave the Catholic voluntary secondary school of today and tomorrow? Although loved all over the world, the Catholic school in Ireland has been, of late, a bit like the dandelions in a Patrick Kavanagh poem, 'showing their unloved hearts to everyone'.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of an unprecedented review of patronage in primary schools with an agenda not only to diminish the number of Catholic schools but also the catholicity of those schools that remain Catholic, you could easily pass over the fact that post-primary Catholic schools are under similar existential pressure. One cost of the 'unloved' factor is that where the map of Ireland formerly lit up with schools established by the great congregational founders, we are now seeing lights going out all over the place. Before this year is out McGahern's native county will no longer have a Catholic voluntary secondary school to offer to its parents. Few of us are naïve enough not to see the odds being stacked against Catholic schools through financial discrimination and resource starvation, the railroad of amalgamation, the favoured status of alternative patrons and the cultivated myth that Catholic schools, like Kavanagh's dandelions, are weeds that have spread too far.

The question that engages many in our schools is: why are our schools not loved, treasured and defended more in the current national imagination, given the history of an institution that lifted Irish people out of the gutter, the high ideals behind that history, the social capital created, and the experience of so many of us within the institution of the quotidian work of unsurpassed beauty carried on within the walls?

Who loves our Catholic schools and will they find enough lovers to survive the present onslaught? Will they succumb to the extreme unction of an education ministry poised as undertaker, or will an Irish public that allowed the demise of the Harcourt Street Line and the Dalkey Tram (and almost allowed the humble pencil to be replaced with e-voting machines) come to see again in these schools the national treasure that they undoubtedly are? If some of our contemporary 'visionaries' get their way that will not be the outcome.

If losing our national bearings can turn an economic miracle into a social disaster, what is going to stop the equivalent wastage of a spiritually rich educational heritage?

<sup>1</sup> John McGahern 'A Literature without Qualities' in *Love of the World*. Faber and Faber 2009, p.183

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Kavanagh 'Spraying the Potatoes' in *Collected Poems*. Martin Brian & O'Keefe, London 1972 p.78

As thoughts gather in response to those questions, other varieties of question begin to form and take edge. You wonder if it might finally be time for the 'we' of Catholic schools to wake up completely to the force-field in which we find ourselves and to fast-forward the systemic cohesion we desperately need to conceive and protect our future. At present we have so many corporate bodies and so little leverage. We often resemble a supine Montezuma foolishly welcoming Cortez to his Aztec capital when he should have noted the gait of the marauder and protected his civilisation. If we persist with being lambs to the slaughter we should also remember Christ's words about salt that has lost its flavour being trodden underfoot (Mt. 5.13).

If this is somehow to be a matter of flavour, would it now be time for us to restore our saltiness and to distil a simplified theological brand-truth about what we hold to be uniquely good and beautiful and true in the education of young people. In a new courtship of the Irish educational imagination would it be possible that we cope better with the matchmakers for other suitors when they denigrate us in partisan discourses about human rights, inclusion, and the hegemony of the secular? In a world in which secularists proceed as if they have won the day, might it not be time to assert that it is not that they have won but that they have convinced so many into thinking that they have?<sup>3</sup> If there are myths to be dealt with, should we not tackle especially the fundamental myth that the 'age of enchantment' is finally past and that the 'porous' self of medieval man has given way to a superior 'buffered' self, hermeneutically sealed against the transcendent?<sup>4</sup> Maybe it is time for a new enchantment and the acknowledgement of a porosity that reflects other pictures of the world whose validity, even in the eyes of great scientists and philosophers, remains and deepens. Our new cosmology says we are porous as star-dust and our parameters as mysterious as dark matter.<sup>5</sup> A new mysticism tells us to look at the pictures people make with their lives, to respect their intuitions and forget the positivist dogmatism.<sup>6</sup> Might we align with that, and with the heart-forged, long-serving common sense which says that the education of children cannot forego the world of enchantment, nor indeed the kind of 'benediction' articulated so magnificently in the recent Irish spiritual imagination by John O'Donohue?<sup>7</sup> The world is loved in the eyes of children and what is denied to the philosophers is revealed to a child. It is increasingly evident that the terminal point of the buffered self is an age of exultant hubris mixed with

the most profound gloom. Even the atheists are getting lonesome for religion.<sup>8</sup> Might it be time at last for the prophetic imagination of an awakened Catholic school sector, working closely with fellow Christian schools and with those in other schools who promote a Christian ethos, to square up to the 'royal consciousness' of the various Pharaohs that surround us?<sup>9</sup> When we were configured as the light of the world and the salt of the earth was it ever intended that we be innocuous dandelions marooned on headlands?

But I am getting ahead of myself and arming for war when courtship is more the rubric of this reflection. The proposition is that what is loved survives. Of the many challenges that Catholic schools are encountering at the moment, the one I want to address here revolves around hearts and minds and more precisely the winning of them. It is fundamentally a spiritual challenge and in order to advance its consideration I want to reflect on why Catholic schools may be loved and unloved and to look at what we should be saying of the future, so that the schools we love are loved and survive. Because ultimately, if we are to survive, it is the loved heart of the Catholic school that we will need to show.

### Why Catholic Schools are Loved

That Catholic schools have survived until now means, in the logic of McGahern's equation, that they have been loved. McGahern himself wrote as follows of the love story of his education at Presentation Brothers in Carrick on Shannon:

*I look back on those years as the beginning of an adventure that has never stopped. Each day as I cycled towards Carrick was an anticipation of delights. The fear and drudgery of school disappeared. Without realising it, through the pleasures of the mind, I was beginning to know and to love the world. The Brothers took me in, sat me down, and gave me tools. I look back on my time there with nothing but gratitude, as years of luck and privilege – and of grace, actual grace'<sup>10</sup>*

A Catholic school is a place that teaches us 'to know and to love the world', a place of 'grace', 'adventure', and 'delight', a loveable place. Some of us loved the Catholic school for that learning and love of learning, the doors opening, the imagination released. Others loved it for the wonderful teachers that transformed

<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of people still believe in God and pray frequently. *European Values Study 2008*.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor *A Secular Age*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Berry *The Dream of the Earth* Sierra Club Books, San Francisco 1988, reissued 2006

<sup>6</sup> Peter Tyler *The Return to the Mystical Continuum*, London and New York, 2011

<sup>7</sup> John O'Donohue *Benedictus, A Book of Blessings* Transworld Publishers, 2007

<sup>8</sup> See Alain de Botton: *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*. Hamish Hamilton 2012. See also Christopher Hitchens' tribute to the lost vocabulary of the King James Bible in 'When the King Saved God' in *Arguably*, Atlantic Books, London 2011 p 687 - 696

<sup>9</sup> See Walter Brueggemann: *The Prophetic Imagination*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis. Second Edition 2001

<sup>10</sup> Mc Gahern, J. *Memoir*. Faber and Faber. London (2005) p. 171

our lives – masters and mistresses, scholars and enthusiasts – the magnanimity, the depth of humanity. The Catholic school has always attracted great lovers in its teachers. Others again loved it for its pastoral care, for the eye for strays, the attention to lost sheep, the good shepherding, and the multiple stories of voluntary contribution envelopes that were sensitively steered away from those who couldn't afford to pay.

When I asked a woman in a Dublin school a couple of years ago, why she kept saying that she loved the Catholic school she attended and why she was so happy now to have her daughter there, she answered me in one (some people will think surprising) word: 'safety'. 'I know she is safe here. I trust my child to this school and the people here. I want for her what I got here and lost and would love to have again. I want it for her.'

What that woman wanted was more than good academic results and good discipline. Good results and good discipline for sure, but more. It was something involving values, spirituality and perspective, a picture of the world that in a bewildering age offered her the psycho-spiritual safety she craved for her child, the assurance of goodness, truth and beauty, optimally conceived, grounded and shown. A Catholic school believes in 'the transcendent mystery of God as the source of all that exists and as the meaning of human existence'.<sup>11</sup> It believes that there is no greater safety in the universe than the love of God, and when it is evident in a place and its people and passed on to children, it is not unusual for a parent to recognise it and remember it and want it for her child.

Catholic schools have been particularly safe places in some of the most run-down areas of our country. Inner city Catholic schools are often quiet refuges of beauty on scales some of our opinion makers could not begin to calibrate. In so many instances - that one dare not name - there has been an extraordinary faithfulness to the poor.

Whether people have been able to put words on it or not, what many loved in a Catholic school was the love behind the love they received, the 'first love' that Henri Nouwen liked to talk about, God's first love for us.<sup>12</sup> As St. John put it, 'Let us love because God loved us first' (1 John 4:19). The fundamental message was that we were loved children of God destined for fullness of life, that the hairs on our head were numbered by a God who longed to gather us like a hen gathers its chickens (Lk.13:34). Love was the God-given DNA of the world and life meant

flourishing in that love and scattering it in every direction like a sower going out to sow seed. What people loved about a Catholic school was that in a changing world it said and still says to a young person: 'you are loved, there is no reason to be afraid'. Love, it tells us, is the key to our lives. When a Catholic school is in flow, the love of God is in flow. For very many people this was a lesson carried in their bones for the rest of their days.

Whether it was for lifting them out of the gutter or preparing them to meet the world, for putting them into a show or a retreat, onto a sports field or out collecting for *Concern*, people loved Catholic schools for the picture they painted of a world conceived as essentially sacramental and revelatory of a loving God. To the extent that the first chapter in the life story of a young person was written out of the message and values of the Gospel, there was no question that Catholic schools were loved places.

### When Catholic Schools are Not Loved

No-one is saying, however, that everything was written out of the message and values of the Gospel, or that everything about Catholic schools was loved. If the unloved heart is indicated we need to come to terms with it.

You might begin here by saying that everyone has a part of him or her that will never love school anyway. School is invariably an institution saying 'not yet' to an impatient younger generation. Given that school is school, that many people find it hard to gain passage without harbouring a revenge fantasy of some kind, and given the preponderance of Catholic schools in Ireland, it is inevitable that so many of our educational revenge fantasies involve Catholic schools: the teacher that did not believe in you and how you showed her up in what you became; the man who said that the only thing he learned in school was that he was no good. These are sad things to hear about any school, especially a Catholic school whose calling was to assure those children that they were children of God, wonder-children of inestimable value. How could we have talked so much about the love of God and forgotten so often about the essentials of self esteem?

Some people will tell you that there was an atavistic Jansenism somewhere in the timbers and those of us who are old enough remember it. How it cultivated mortification and punitive discipline, the idea that education was not possible without instilling fear. But we have to be discerning about what we allow to be dumped on the Catholic school. A country that in my clear memory did not

waste anaesthetic in child dentistry and where your grandmother dried up your tears with words about mortification when you came home, was hardly going to provide schools where you were wrapped in cotton wool no matter how gentle a saint the institution was named after. The milieu in which Catholic schools grew in Ireland was not a milk and honey milieu. It was a tough time, it was a tough society in so many ways and schools could be tough places.

No matter how we balance it, however, we cannot wriggle blameless from the hook of responsibility for the unloved factor. When we look honestly at our history we have to forget the perfect offering. When, for instance, you look at why Catholic schools were loved for faithfulness to the poor, for inclusiveness, for love of children – you come up against the truth that faithfulness to the poor was not absolute, inclusion not absolute and love of children not absolute. When Leonard Cohen said in one of his songs that he was faithful to his lover, 'more or less', you could only say the same of Catholic school faithfulness to the Gospel, to Jesus Christ, to the congregational founders.

Failure is not a word we would want to associate with Catholic schools but maybe it needs to be put up there. Maybe it needs its shrine. We will not look at Catholic schools productively unless we realise that there were failures to live up to what the ideal was. Whatever these failures were, they were ultimately failures in love. We failed to introduce young people to the Carpenter from Galilee because we did not love him enough and love them enough to do so. We often ran out of colour when painting a Christian picture of the world. We failed some young people whose misbehaviour was a flag, waving for the necessary attention they were never going to get. We failed to teach the meaning of what we were about and in that dereliction not only did our pupils not know what a Catholic school was fundamentally about, teachers didn't know either and many worked out their lives without epiphany. We often failed to give sufficient psychological and spiritual stays for the storms ahead - witness the attrition in the lives of many past pupils, the shallow values, the amount of alcoholism and suicide, the lives of desperation. Witness the inane conversations about faith at dinner tables among people who spent years in Religious Education classes. We failed to teach ethics in such a way as to ensure our past pupils would not be bearers of brown envelopes. For whatever reason we failed to teach that kind of integrity and must carry some of the blame for a shoddy value system that fed national characteristics of which it is impossible to be proud, such as the national cover up of abuse or the nod and wink economics that bankrupt our country. We failed because we had the

nation in the palm of our hand for so long and we still ended up with such an absence of a civic society and such indifference to justice. We failed them also, in the years when they were coming to sexual awakening, by failing to teach them what sexuality was about. Because we weren't sure ourselves, and parents left it to us, and the Church was going on and on about the vocation to celibacy as if nothing else mattered. If we put up shrines to our goodness, truth and beauty we must also have shrines to our failures.

To the extent that they failed in love, Catholic schools were unfaithful to their highest ideals and earned the unloved wages of sin. Perhaps the most eloquent indictment of our failure occurs when a past pupil for whom we imagine we did so much turns in another direction without a thought of us when choosing a school for his or her child. Our failures call for real anguish rather than denial, for out of anguish comes conversion, atonement, transformation and hope. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mt. 5.4).

### Towards a Loved Future

If there is to be a new courtship, a new enchantment and the renewal of the loved heart of the Catholic school, there is no doubt that we have work to do. As Hans Kung put it in another context, we need to work with the Holy Spirit 'to wash what is stained...to heal what is wounded...to water what is barren...to bend what has become rigid...to warm what has become cold... to direct what is going astray.'<sup>13</sup> Our re-imagining needs to continue and our somnambulant derelictions need to end. We need, in the words of Cordelia, to heave our hearts into our mouths,<sup>14</sup> to end the long night of our timidity and to put our light out there for all to see. We need to galvanize our Boards of Management, to raise the bar of faith-school leadership and above all to nourish the spirituality of our teachers, illuminating the slender threads of their lives, the seasons of their hearts and the voice calling them.

We live our lives by the quality of our attention. What you pay attention to becomes your life. Jesus said that 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Mt. 6.21). The quality of our attention over the coming years is critical, particularly after all the years of scarcely thinking about what we were doing. In a way we should be grateful to those who are pulling the rug from under us because it is finally waking us up.

A loved future for our Catholic schools will be won on the back of much of what we already have: on our schools being good schools by any standard; being places where the loving of young people into life is especially coherent; places which give to parents a profound sense of psycho-spiritual safety for their children; places that enchant young people with the world in its awesome beauty and makes them capable of a Eucharistic gratitude for all that is good. They will be places also that gird them, through an understanding of the Paschal Mystery and the Cross, for the world's harshness and brutality; places that give them safe harbours and supportive stays for the storms ahead. They will be places that offer students the prophetic imagination to look compassion on the world,<sup>15</sup> to challenge what is not right, to be witnesses for justice and passionate enablers of a better future. They will be places that, in the words of Joan Chittister OSB (echoing Rilke), will be known more for the questions they teach young people to ask than for the answers they teach them to give.<sup>16</sup> If we have a secret, and it is no secret, it is that we work out of a well-spring that offers such graces, loved or unloved, to anyone who wants to partake. Our best roadmap to a loved future is to be better at revealing our secret to the world, and to Ireland in particular.

We must pay particular attention to parents who are considering the best partner in the education of their children. We should have little to fear from people who want their children to live rich spiritual and psychologically aware lives. In so far as that is what people want and love, we will remain a significant option, a beacon, a powerful remnant. But we will not be faithful to our calling and heritage if we do not also reach out to those who do not value such an enchantment, whose search for truth points them elsewhere, or for whom living a spiritually rich and psychologically aware life is not a high priority. They too will be our respectful mission field. A Catholic school sector that confines itself narrowly to the Catholic faithful will not be good for the gospel message, for ecumenism or for the world at large.

It goes without saying that our mission field is set against the background of a church crisis of major proportions and, as said above, a secular world where imagining there's no heaven is easier than ever if you try. Part of the game is somewhat out of our hands – the church part. A dead church will leave a dead hand on Catholic schools. If in the words of Martin Henry writing in *The Irish Times* recently, 'the public face of Catholicism has come to resemble a death mask, no longer capable of registering awareness of a new age or radiating any vital connection with the truth',<sup>17</sup> we are in the kind of deep trouble that strikes at the very heart of us. Such an outcome will demand of the Catholic school that

it get on with its mission in the open ground between one era and another, not so much being led as leading, being the place where church is most real until such time as the wheel turns again. A more vibrant church, on the other hand, will be a great boon to the Catholic school, bringing with it a new evangelisation, a more engaged laity and more democratic structures with communal payback.

The future of Catholic schools is inextricably linked to the future of faith, ideally the living faith of the dead, the faith of our fathers, as opposed to the dead faith of the living.<sup>18</sup> We cannot avoid being involved here. The living version is nowhere more alive than in that space where the discourses of education and culture meet the discourse of faith in a Catholic school. It is our calling to inhabit that space with every fibre of our being and when the royal consciousness of today suggests that faith is an anachronism, we must counter that view, not in a chauvinistic way but standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow humanity, ready to give reason for the hope that is in us (I Peter 15). As Martin Henry goes on to say in the same article, 'the enduring truth of the Christian message will always find a way through to humanity. For religion is not something we have, but what we are.' Faith is the well-spring to which a Catholic school returns time after time. We must be always thinking of it. When others stop thinking we go on thinking, dreaming, linking, imagining and reimagining, putting our hearts where our treasures are.

## Our Open Secret

When Fr. Lou Delfra, chaplain to the Alliance for Catholic Education at Notre Dame University, spoke to the CEIST Education Conference two years ago he said that a Catholic school is simply defined as a place where someone is in contact with Jesus Christ. For it is only through that mystical contact, he said, that introductions are made. Although God is always knocking on the door of the human heart, we must play our part in introducing young people to the one who gives a Christian school its name, its mind, its heart, its prophetic imagination, and its catholic invitation that all are welcome. In His life amongst us, then and now, in His death on a cross, in His parables, His teaching, His healing, His outreach to people on the margins, His turning over of tables, Christ reveals to us the imagination of God set against the endless possibility of life and the insane brutality to which life is often reduced. Our lives are caught up in the mystery of Christ's living, dying and rising and it is in these numinous mysteries and out of them that a Catholic school paints its picture of the world.

<sup>15</sup> Teresa of Avila (from her famous 'Christ has no body now but yours')

<sup>17</sup> The Irish Times, Rite and Reason column, January 24, 2012

<sup>16</sup> Joan Chittister OSB, speaking at the *Reimagining the Catholic School* conference, City West 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Henry *ibid* (quoting Jaroslav Pelikan *The Vindication of Tradition* 1984)

Contact with Christ is the mystical energy of a Catholic school and nowhere is that contact taught and made better than in prayer. If we are not going to teach our students to pray we may as well fold our tents now and be at peace with the dandelions. Prayer is the key to the psycho-spiritual safety a Catholic school offers to its students.

In her diary entry for May 18, 1942, Etty Hillesum a young Jewish mystic who died in Auschwitz in 1943, wrote about prayer in her life. She said that as the threats grew greater and the terror increased day by day, she drew prayer around herself like a dark protective wall from which she could step outside calmer and stronger.<sup>19</sup> From behind such protective walls, calm and strong, is how we want our students to step out into the world.

They will need to be calm and strong. Many will live to be one hundred years old. Their lives will encounter surprises we can scarcely imagine, quickenings beyond our calculation, choices we never had to make, temptations we can scarcely foresee. There will be new developments in humanity's collective unconscious, greater hubris perhaps and maybe deeper gloom. While drone technology advances, wars will be fought on earth from platforms in space.<sup>20</sup> There will be greater knowledge and control of human biology and genetics, and maybe by mid century the discovery of other life-forms in the universe. The explosion in information technology will continue and there will be dramatic new turnings in the wheels of economy and ecology.

We need to think a lot more about the strength and calmness we want our students to have going out into that world. When Timothy Radcliffe said that to be a Christian is to have a special kind of happiness, a special kind of freedom, a special kind of courage and a special kind of hope <sup>21</sup> he was offering another angle on what Etty Hillesum found in her prayer tradition which is continuous with our own. If out of our long heritage and clear characteristic spirit our students leave us with special calmness and strength, with special happiness, freedom, courage and hope, there will always be a place in the world for schools such as ours. And as our students step away from us at graduation they will look back at loved places and wish for nowhere better to send their own children, when the time comes.

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EILEEN RANDLES



## The Long Lead-Up to AMCSS

<sup>19</sup> Etty Hillesum *An Interrupted Life*. Jonathan Cape Ltd 1983

<sup>21</sup> Timothy Radcliffe OP *What is the point of being a Christian?* Burns and Oates 2005

Current conversations about the forthcoming Silver Jubilee of AMCSS have prompted amazed Principals to ask us survivors from the 1960s

*“What on earth was it like before the AMCSS was established? How could you possibly have functioned without the Secretariat as we know it?”*

Well, actually – we had our own ‘TROIKA’ in those pre-AMCSS/Secretariat days!

Many fine books and learned papers have been published to document developments in Irish education. In many instances, however, the ‘back stories’ remain untold, overshadowed as they can be by the drama of the main event and so surviving only in the memories of individuals.

The debate we hear nowadays about the need for ‘one voice’ to represent the interests of Catholic schools was also around in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that stage, some 17 or 18 different groups claimed to represent elements of Secondary education.

A number of efforts were made to agree various representative Committees but these fizzled out repeatedly because of lack of agreement about membership and organisation. Education events in the early 1960s, however, highlighted the real need to have an identified group with a mandate to represent the interests of Managers of Secondary schools. It seemed logical and comparatively simple to recognise as this group, the Presidents and named Representative of the main existing Management Associations.

However, it appears that some of the Bishops were still uneasy about conferring ‘power’ on any such representative Management group. Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin - himself a former President of the Catholic Headmasters’ Association - circumvented the reservations of his Episcopal Colleagues by inviting an initial group of three to take tea now and then in Archbishop’s House in Drumcondra. The group which met in Drumcondra were Mother Jordana Roche, O.P. (President of the Conference of Convent Secondary Schools, established 1929). Fr John Hughes S.J. (President of the Catholic Headmasters’ Association established 1878) and Brother Joseph Welsh for the Brothers, whose Association of Teaching Brothers was formally recognised in 1964/65. In due course, these three representatives of Catholic School Managers were joined for tea by Canon Gerard Magahy on behalf of the Protestant schools.

Thus was the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) initiated in 1964.

There has never been a distinct national infrastructure for the JMB nor indeed a Constitution. From the start, the acknowledged role of the JMB is derived from its joint mandate to represent both Protestant and Catholic Secondary schools. By degrees, the JMB was to become the main representative Body for the Secondary schools in Ireland, existing right up to the present. The Drumcondra ‘tea-parties’ gave way to serious meetings and negotiations as the role of the JMB became established and recognised by both the Department of Education and the schools. The JMB paved the way for the Catholic Managers’ Association which came later.

The impact of announcements by successive Ministers for Education in the 1960s may not be immediately evident to us in 2012, accustomed as we have become to many changes initiated and imposed by the Department of Education. In the 1960s, however, Secondary schools were hearing for the first time about structural changes to be introduced by the State in a sector which had remained untouched and virtually unchanged for many years. This was quite a novel experience for Secondary school authorities who were accustomed to following a familiar programme and organisation with little “interference” from the Department.

The first such change was the announcement in May 1963 by the Minister for Education, Dr Patrick Hillery, that a number of Comprehensive schools were to be established. The more extensive change was to come from the opening up to the Vocational schools of the academic curriculum and Intermediate Certificate examination previously reserved to Secondary schools.

What would happen next? Who would look out for the interests of the managers of secondary schools – a group dismissed as “outside Bodies” by the Minister in Dáil Éireann? The Bishops were consulted by the Department of Education on a number of occasions. But their Lordships were not always well versed in the impact on the school floor of some developments. Neither were there lines of communication between the Bishops and school Managers. It was not unusual throughout the 1960s for Representatives of the Managers to approach the Department only to learn that the issue had already been discussed and agreed with the Bishops! While the Bishops were of course concerned for the Diocesan Colleges of which they were Patrons, it was essential that the voice of the Managers of Secondary schools run by the Religious Orders was also heard.

Next came the announcement early in 1964 (before an important election!) by the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass that – for the first time – the State would provide some funding towards the cost of building or extending Secondary schools. While there

was surprise – relief – delight – at the prospect of State financial aid for Secondary school buildings, there were also concerns. The likelihood of the State paying the piper and therefore calling the tune dampened to some degree the enthusiasm for the Taoiseach's announcement. Voluntary Secondary schools - which were autonomous, independent and up to then built entirely from the funds of the Religious Orders – could apply now for building grants, but at a price. In return for financial aid, the State could dictate the location and timing of a new school, determine the size of the school, the number of classrooms – even as was said at the time “details such as the width of the corridors, for heaven's sake!” The realisation of this prospect induced a sense of anxiety and insecurity in school authorities who up to then were almost self-determining. One significant Managers' group was so concerned that they urged the Department of Education not to provide grants for buildings but rather to increase the salaries of the teachers! In retrospect, we must be pleased that the suggestion was not taken up!

A new concept of 'interventionism' by the State began to be discussed in school circles. An emerging trend of equating education with economics was also a new approach which caused concern. While schools had always seen education as equipping the person to be a good citizen, contributing to the welfare and progress of society, was there a danger that the primacy of the person could be subsumed in a more short-term utilitarian pragmatic expectation of the outcomes of education? In an Ireland struggling to expand its economic base, could the person become more valued for what s/he could do rather than for who s/he was?

The management Associations represented by the new JMB quickly found themselves called to reassure schools that changes to be introduced need not interfere with the heart of their work. Two-way communication became a key issue, particularly as education matters did not feature much in the media at the time. After many unsuccessful attempts at some rationalisation, in February 1966 the three management Associations of the Catholic schools finally formed the Catholic Managerial Committee (CMC) as a representative Body specifically for Catholic Secondary schools.

From the start there was overlap of personnel in the JMB and the CMC. Fr John Hughes SJ was Chairman of both Bodies. There was no great clarity about role boundaries between the JMB and the CMC. Indeed, both Bodies sometimes had a go at the Department of Education about the same issues in an effort to elicit information and to express the concerns of the schools. Was the pattern

of JMB/CMCSS already emerging? Incidentally, one wonders why they didn't hold on to the title CMC which is so much easier to say than 'CMCSS'. Even if it had become the Catholic Managers/Principals Association (CMPA) to include Principals it would still have been easier to say. To this day we refer to the JMB when CMCSS might be the more appropriate body, simply because the title CMCSS is rather awkward to say!

The setting up of the CMC did not replace the individual Catholic Secondary school Associations which continued as separate entities, each with its own structure and personnel. The CCSS was sufficiently large to sustain a network of branches which held regular meetings for its members where information and reactions were shared.

The next move was to organise county-based meetings of the Catholic school managers and principals. These meetings were more successful in some areas than in others. The level of separateness - indeed even of competition between schools (even between schools of the same religious Order) - was remarkable at that time. In pre-Vatican II days, there was limited contact between those in charge of schools. The County meetings of the Managers and Principals of the Catholic schools provided a forum where – eventually – barriers began to weaken and disappear. Sharing information and concerns – and even acknowledging occasional problems in individual schools – generated a support and friendship where before there was distance and perhaps distrust. It used to be said that the men came to the County meeting for the tomato sandwiches and home-made apple tart (posh in those days!) and stayed for the information which the women usually had from their CCSS meetings! Without realising it, these County meetings, which continued for a number of years, were laying down the template for the regional meetings of AMCSS some 20 years later.

In the Dublin area, there was the organisation by the Diocese of the Dublin Education Council for Catholic Secondary schools (referred to as 'DECKS'). This group of Managers and Principals met on an area basis and sent a representative to meetings of a central Council in Clonliffe. The attendance of the Religious Managers and Principals at the increasing number of meetings about education was facilitated by the changes promoted by Vatican II. This was particularly true in the case of the Sisters who up to then had rarely gone outside their Convents. Indeed it was said that if Vatican II had not happened, the Religious in Ireland would have had to invent it!

Of course at this stage there was considerable 'blurring' of the roles of manager and principal. In some cases, the one person held both roles. In other cases, the Manager was the Superior of the local Religious Community which ran the school. The Religious who was Principal of the schools had to teach full-time to earn a salary – no administrative Principals then and no additional allowance attached to the role. But, in truth, schools were smaller and life was simpler – even if the boarders who were in almost every school had to be looked after 24/7.

There was still no Secretariat, no central office.

School Managers were pleased to have the JMB/CMC in place during discussions about the introduction of the 'free scheme' for Secondary schools even if there was little success in the efforts to get clarification about aspects of the proposed scheme. On the afternoon of Saturday, September 10, 1966 the JMB Representatives were called into the Department of Education (schools and offices were open on Saturdays then!). The group was told that the new Minister for Education, Donough O'Malley, would make an important announcement that evening. It appears that the group was not given more than a general outline of what the Minister's news would be. None of your 'partnership' or transparency in those days! Like the rest of the country, the JMB read in their Sunday newspapers (September 11, 1966) that the Minister proposed the introduction of a free education scheme from the following September (1967).

Over the following months, school leaders looked to the JMB/CMC for advice on the terms of the proposed scheme. Fr. Hughes SJ sought scarce information from the Department of Education, writing now on behalf of the JMB, now on behalf of the CMC. Neither approach brought much success from the Civil Servants who were not sure themselves what would emerge! Along with the ASTI, the JMB failed to convince Minister O'Malley that it would be advisable to allow a longer run-in time for the introduction of the free scheme. Extra classrooms, additional teachers, revised syllabi would all be needed. Perhaps the Minister decided that the only way forward was to press ahead irrespective of concerns raised? Perhaps political expediency informed his determination? In retrospect we can acknowledge that he was right but at the time an unhelpful sense of alienation developed between the Department of Education and the schools. There was definitely a role for the JMB/CMC.

In September 1967, free education became available for 92% of all day pupils. About 15,000 extra pupils arrived in the Secondary schools around the country

that September, with an additional extra 3,000 in the Vocational schools. This growth in numbers ensured that schools could easily meet the newly increased enrolment deemed essential by the Department of Education for a viable school. The issue of pupil numbers and the threat of closure of small schools was quietly in the background to all considerations of the free scheme.

The provision of free transport to schools was more valuable to parents than the elimination of fees. The JMB/CMC secured a role for the Principals of Secondary schools on local Committees discussing the provision of free transport to be organised by the VEC. Issues about the routes of the school bus and the terminus of the bus in the town were significant to all the schools in the centre. Have these committees disappeared altogether by now, even though the transport arrangements have still to be decided and implemented?

Because of the confusion and turbulence in the system as it struggled to meet the needs of so many extra pupils, the JMB may have missed the significance of an announcement made by the Department of Education about Boarding schools. A limit was set to what could be charged for boarders if the school expected to receive the free education tuition grant for all the pupils in the school. This uneconomic limit was a factor in many Orders deciding to close the boarding section of their schools over the following years. In any case, most pupils could now avail of the free transport to the schools and the former dormitories were converted to classrooms.

The lack of clarity regarding the operation of the free scheme generated real and sustained frustration among school personnel. This gave a new impetus to the need for a strong voice for Catholic education. This voice now included that of the Federation of Catholic Lay schools, led by Mr. Sean Hamilton. The FCLS quietly joined the JMB in 1967. In the academic year 1967/68, a decision was made to formalise a Council of Management of Catholic Secondary schools (CMCSS) composed of Representatives of the managerial bodies. By 1971, a small part-time Central office, funded by the schools, was set up in a room over Veritas Bookshop in Middle Abbey St, Dublin for Fr John Hughes SJ who continued as Chairman of JMB as well as of CMCSS. The office became full-time in 1972. A limp effort was made to identify and separate the functions of management from the policy functions reserved to the Bishops and Major Superiors. There was continuing confusion between the role of the JMB (which included the Protestant schools) and that of the CMCSS (which included a Bishop and CORI). Have we reached clarity yet?

Some of the advice emanating from the small Education office would create waves to-day. For example, there was the Convent school with a serious IR problem heading for the Courts. The Sisters were advised to 'act like men' (conveyed in the Latin 'age virilitur'). Could you imagine the officials in today's Secretariat offering this advice to any school today – whether in English or in Latin? (Incidentally, the school won the case!) But there were successes too. In 1969 the JMB/CMCSS was central in organising the unified reaction of the Secondary schools to the teachers' strike against the imposition of a common basic salary scale for all teachers. The schools closed for three weeks. An outcome of this strike and of a second threatened strike was the introduction of post of responsibility allowances and an allowance for principals, who would not in future be required to teach. The JMB had an input into what became familiar as "the Agreed Memo" which set out the procedures for appointment to posts of responsibility. Perhaps today's negotiators would have taken a stronger line on some aspects of the agreement? The JMB also negotiated that, along with two representatives of ASTI, there would be representatives of the Catholic and Protestant schools on the Appeals Board dealing with posts of responsibility.

The next shock to the education system was the publication in the Irish Times of November 12, 1970 of the leaked unsigned document announcing the Department of Education's plans for Community schools. It is now generally forgotten that the main target of that original document was the creation of a single Community school in towns where there were already 2 or 3 post-Primary schools. This, in effect, would result in the amalgamations of the schools in almost every town in the country. The aim was to establish a single school unit of 400-800 pupils, providing a comprehensive range of subjects for both boys and girls. Brother Declan Duffy emerged as a strong negotiator at this stage, initially for CMRS (now CORI). In the event, the main thrust of the Community school development changed to providing new schools in 'greenfield' areas. The concept of a Board of Management rather than an individual Manager was introduced in the Community school discussions. Boards of Management were introduced in Primary schools in 1975.

It is difficult to convey the sense of distrust and alienation experienced by those in charge of Secondary schools in the 1960s and 1970s. School managers and principals felt bombarded from all sides by new demands, changes of policy and approach, uncertainty about the future and about their ability to sustain their schools. Even the representative body for Religious (CORI) seemed to be questioning the future with the publication of the report on 'Future involvement of Religious in Education' (FIRE Report) in 1973. That same year, a regionalised structure for education was proposed but dropped.

Fr. Hughes resigned in 1975. He was succeeded by Mr Liam Murphy who held the position of Chairman (now President) of JMB/CMCSS with distinction for over 20 years. It was recognised by then that a full-time director of the central education office was needed. For the first time, this role would be distinct from that of the Chairman of JMB/CMCSS. To everyone's amazement, it proved difficult to fill this post. Perhaps the position was still vague, perceived to be accountable to many but with limited authority. Whatever 'power' the director had over individual Religious Orders or schools was 'persuasive' only. After a review of the role over two years and some (though not much!) clarification, Brother Declan Duffy accepted appointment as Director of the office for an initial period of five years from 1977. His contract was subsequently extended. Brother Declan was to become one of the most respected and influential figures in Irish education from the 1970s to 1996 when he retired.

The central office was moved to Tabor House in Milltown Park and assumed the title of the 'Secretariat of Secondary schools' serving the needs of both the JMB and CMCSS schools. Quite quickly, then, a professional approach to many issues began to emerge. The Council of the JMB/CMCSS, to which Brother Declan worked, was still composed of representatives of the different managerial associations, each of which still continued to operate within its own 'silo'.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to establish Boards of Management in Secondary schools, agreement with ASTI was finally reached in 1985/86. This development prompted a serious examination of the representative organisation for Catholic Secondary schools. A comparatively simple structure emerged quite soon after agreement on Boards of Management. The chairperson of the board and the principal would attend meetings in regions. Each region would elect two representatives to a Central Council. The regions formed the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary schools (AMCSS) and the Central Council, with representatives also of the Bishops and of CORI, became the Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS). An annual conference would be held for the AMCSS. The structure, with the approval of the Bishops and of CORI, came into existence in 1987.

The members of the CMCSS, without the Bishop and the CORI representative, but including the representatives of the Protestant schools, became the JMB, continuing on from those distant tea-parties in 1964!

Of course there was some resistance to the new structure from the 'old guard' of the individual managerial associations – perhaps particularly from the men?

However, the individual associations set about disbanding themselves. Then it was discovered that membership of various committees (e.g. the Registration Council for Secondary Teachers) was based on representation of those associations. So the associations had to continue in a sort of 'virtual state' for some years until new structures (e.g. The Teaching Council) were set up. There is even a rumour that the CHA was never formally disbanded – but quiet meetings of their members seem to have ceased by now! Or have they?

So, 25 years ago, we began to benefit from the AMCSS/ CMCSS/JMB and from the still expanding services of the Education Secretariat, now based in Emmet House, Milltown.

The CMCSS/JMB – in various forms – has been involved in negotiations about our Secondary schools since the early 1960s. Now and then we hear concerns expressed that the focus of these negotiations seems to look to issues of control rather than to the essence of Catholic education within our schools. Does the vision become obscured by a concentration on the structures?

It is acknowledged that the language used in legislation, protocols, procedures, agreements can be technical, dry, impersonal, unappealing. This language can appear far removed from pastoral concerns or educational principles. However, we could scarcely operate today without the active and skilled Representative Body of the CMCSS which engages with complex and lengthy negotiations on our behalf. Only in this way can we ensure that any structures agreed or imposed will not impede our schools' ability to live out the 'founding intention' of their Patron Body.

We need to be led effectively and securely through a maze of issues so that we can avoid potential obstacles to the person-centred task of education. Assured of that leadership, we, in our turn, can focus our energies and interests on the students in our schools. Happily, AMCSS/ CMCSS continues also to provide inspiration, constantly reminding us of the 'why' of our endeavours and of our mission to provide a worthy Catholic education for the children of our nation.

The prophet Jeremiah (6:16) urges us to '*Stand at the crossroads; consider well the path that has led you this far*'. The occasion of a Jubilee provides us with an opportunity to take time to remember with gratitude, to recall, to review and to move forward with confidence and renewed energy.

The journey continues....

EITHNE WOULFE

# Towards New Trustees...

## A CORI Perspective

The Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) together with the Irish Episcopal Conference had a central part in the genesis of the unitary system of school management, developing regional and central representative structures, which was eventually to become in 1987, the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools. In the subsequent twenty five years, the CORI Education agenda has been shaped by the development of:

- support provision to congregational leaders as they planned for the future of their educational interests,
- strategic studies, research and engagement in schooling and community education with particular reference to disadvantage and poverty,
- participation in public debate with a view to influencing public policy.

The establishment of the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) in 2007/08, has seen CORI's trustee interest concentrated on the ongoing development of the Catholic Education Service (CES) which has included the setting up in 2010 of the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) in collaboration with the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC). This is informed by an ongoing commitment to the provision of a network of vibrant Catholic schools and educational opportunity for future generations – people, young and older, of faith and none - in a context of greater choice and diversity of school provision in Ireland.

This article will concentrate, from a CORI perspective, on the planning for the future of school interests by religious leadership – the governance/trustee story over recent decades of the Catholic Voluntary Schools, many of them founded by religious in nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland. The trusteeship story encompasses a series of stages leading to an incremental understanding of the meaning and import of being a trustee and the exercise of stewardship in the particular Irish context, where these schools are now all funded and accountable in some measure to the State. This journey culminated in the establishment of new civil and canonical trust arrangements for the majority of Voluntary Schools formerly in the ownership and care of religious communities. This development has had implications for the self understanding of the Catholic school, and for individual and groups of religious families, as well as for members of school communities and related bodies, and the many other stakeholders involved in schooling, including the State. The fact that this story was unfolding in its earlier stages at the same time as the processes leading to the passing and implementation of the *Education Act 1998*, has meant that certain elements of school trusteeship now have a statutory basis and are integrated within the school enterprise, coming, for example, within the remit of the Inspectorate in a whole school approach.<sup>22</sup>

This article identifies five key moments in this trustee/governance story:

- The growing understanding of the Catholic school in Ireland,
- The development of the understanding of governance/trusteeship
- The exploration of structures and systems to support future trusteeship
- Collaborative approaches to trusteeship
- The development of a shared 'Church' partnership with education and the foundation of the Catholic Education Service, and Catholic Schools Partnership.

It will also briefly give some consideration to the journey from family enterprise to new partnerships for the religious school owners/trustees and other key players involved and finally identify some future challenges and hopes for this school sector and its trusteeship.

## The Catholic School in Contemporary Ireland

Societal change, Vatican 2 and the broadening of educational opportunity and access for young and older people, mean that the self-understanding and role of the Catholic school in Ireland in the late 20th century and early 21st century have changed dramatically from that pertaining from post Famine times up to the early 1960s – a time that marked the origins of most voluntary Secondary schools. CORI sponsored a conference in 1991 on *The Catholic School in Contemporary Society*, leading to a publication of the same title.<sup>23</sup> This material was to become part of the discourse informing individual trustees' consideration of their charism in a school context (ethos), the place of the faith school in society and Religious Education. The development by the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), later the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), of a national curriculum in Religious Education for Junior and Leaving certificate was closely followed. Later, in 2003, the outcomes of a longitudinal research study on the impact of Religious Education (non publicly examined curricula) in schools was completed.

In some situations, vision and mission were seen as the prerogative of the trustee bodies. This led to occasional tensions between the CORI Education Office and the Schools Education Board of the Protestant Churches (SEB) on the one hand and other parties such as AMCSS, as for example in 1998/9, when the latter unwittingly set up a focus group to prepare a discussion document on the Catholic school and a series of meetings for a region-wide consideration of the subject. Fortunately, dialogue and progress continued. The joint IEC/CORI-sponsored conference of all school trustees and Vatican Education and Religious Life Offices personnel in Maynooth in 2005, saw further consideration of the Catholic school in society with an emphasis on acknowledging change and complexity, planning for the future and a recognition that Catholic and school are both contested concepts in society.<sup>24</sup> The proceedings of this Conference were later published.<sup>25</sup>

'Vision 08'<sup>26</sup> the pastoral on the Catholic school in Ireland, issued in 2008 by the IEC, emerged from a consultation process with key stakeholders and is part of this tradition of articulating and translating a contemporary vision. This

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education – Inspectorate. *Looking at our School* Dublin: D.E.S, 2002, Education Act 1998, e.g. pars. 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 30. Oireachtas, Dublin 1998

<sup>23</sup> Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS now CORI), *The Contemporary Catholic School* Dublin: CMRS, 1992

<sup>24</sup> Tuohy D. *Issues in Catholic Education in Ireland* in *From Present to Future* c/f below

<sup>25</sup> Woulfe, E., Cassin J., *From Present to Future – Catholic Education for the New Century*, Dublin: Veritas, 2006

<sup>26</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference *Vision 08 – Catholic Education Today. Pastoral of the Irish Bishops*, Maynooth: 2008

trajectory marked a growing recognition of the need for a shared vision and of the fundamental place of all key stakeholders in any such vision, irrespective of the primary responsibility for its articulation and sustainability by a particular party, such as the IEC for Catholic schools. It marks a certain shift from earlier patterns and also reflects the commonality of the tradition for this time while allowing for particular individual emphases to be developed. Such emphases are the particular story of individual schools responding to a local context, trustee groups and school networks. All schools are the same, similar and different. Catholic schools are held in various ways within the Catholic system, in a communion that seeks the integration of both Catholic and educational perspectives. They offer themselves to parents - Catholic only, of all faiths and none, depending on context - while recognising the primacy of Catholic parents as the educators in faith of their children with the freedom to choose a school for them.

### Towards a growing understanding of Governance/Trusteeship

The advent of Community and Comprehensive schools from the late 1960s and the arrangements around regularising the patronage of Primary schools heralded anew the concept of trusteeship and patronage. Prior to this, it had largely been a matter of property rights and obligations, which was part of the remit of religious leadership. The internal organisation of Secondary schools, staffed mainly by religious, meant that a shared value system pertained, with problems as to meaning and values often being resolved informally within the congregation's religious and educational philosophy. It is probably true to suggest that a key moment for some congregations' value-informed judgement came with the decision to be made around opting into the 1966/67 'Free Education' scheme or not. However, the idea of trusteeship being proactive and of property being fundamentally at the service of mission was to grow incrementally in the coming years, culminating in the publication by CORI of the *Handbook on Trusteeship* in 1996.<sup>27</sup>

The Handbook seeks to offer directions to facilitate the religious trustees in ensuring that the founding congregation's religious and educational philosophy is a source of influence in the schools. In so doing, it recognises that the schools are also open to many other influences, some possibly even at variance with that of the congregation.

Chapter 1, in developing a definition of trusteeship, recognises that it must be such as can also be owned by other partners in the school community (parents, teachers et al.). Chapter 2 deals with the ecclesiastical involvement of religious

in schools, drawing on Canon Law and official Church documents. Chapters 3–4 describe the exercise of trusteeship – promotion of the religious and educational philosophy and the legal and financial dimensions of trusteeship. The final chapter raises the issue of the future involvement of religious trustees in schools. Part 11 of the Handbook consists of a series of guidelines, in an attempt to distil and collate good trustee practice in relation to Boards of Management, Finance, Staffing, School Development Planning, Negotiating and Implementing Amalgamations, Planning for School Closures, Promotion of Women for Leadership, Responding to Educational Disadvantage, Enhancing the Role of Parents. Two further guidelines pertain to the congregational role as distinct from that of the trustees: 'Implications of Exercising Trusteeship in a Proactive Manner', which offers an overview of the responsibilities involved in school trusteeship and 'Exploring New Forms of Trusteeship'.

It was decided to defer some guidelines on Religious Education as initial research demonstrated a wide spectrum of diversity among trustees in terms of experiences, expectations and needs in this area, together with a growing pluralism of religious beliefs and none among the school population. Guidelines in other areas were also to be added to the Handbook as a work in progress.

The Handbook which was produced by the Education Commission of CORI, comprising the executive staff and twelve members of various congregations, was supplemented by two publications – *The Future of Trusteeship – a Review of some options on the Way Forward*<sup>28</sup> and *Religious Congregations in Irish Education – a Role for the Future?*<sup>29</sup> Each of these initiatives represents a move away from the 'family' model of business, where vision, culture, leadership and personnel matters may have had the strategic advantage of compelling family engagement and commitment, but also carrying with it a range of potential disadvantages, such as being divisive, controlling, inflexible, overstaying usefulness and over-identification with a past.<sup>30</sup> By this time too, Education offices, initially staffed mainly by religious members but now increasingly by lay professionals, supported and serviced congregational schools and Boards. The publication of this Handbook reflected best practice as well as becoming a template for the development of such services in the coming years. This period possibly represented the peak of the move from 'family' to 'franchise' mode of trusteeship where religious locus of influence was primarily in governance and management with more open, two-way patterns of communication emerging. However, the religious remained independent, with top down relationships and prescribed

<sup>28</sup> Education Commission, Conference of Religious of Ireland. *The Future of Trusteeship – A Review of some of the ways forward*. Dublin: CORI, 1997

*Education – a Role for the Future?*  
Dublin CORI, 1997

<sup>29</sup> Education Commission, Conference of Religious of Ireland. *Religious Congregations in Irish*

<sup>30</sup> Grant, M.K., & Vandenberg, P., *After We're Gone: Creating Sustainable Sponsorship*, Mishawaka, INDIANA: Ministry Development Resources, 1998

standards of accountability. Vision and mission were religious driven and the time perspective was on past (legacy) to present. The trusteeship of Voluntary Secondary Schools was in transition mode.

### Towards new forms of trusteeship

The age profile of religious in schools (a minority presence in most schools by 2000), the impact of Vatican 2 on the role of the laity in the Church, the ongoing rationalisation of Secondary schools and increasing pluralism in society were the main catalysts for the proactive search for new ways of supporting the sustainability of Catholic Secondary schools through new arrangements for their trusteeship.<sup>31</sup> In the latter 1990s, CORI sponsored a number of paper exercise models for future trusteeship:

- A trust established among all schools in a geographical area
- A congregational trust
- Inter-congregational trusts.

This process also sought to identify the core functions of a school trust and subsequently, the models were the subject of a critique by a number of educationalists and historians at the 1996 CORI Education Assembly (CEA). These annual CEA meetings, which involved preparatory and post homework were fact finding, and instructive in promoting the evolution of each school trustee group's position. Simultaneously, religious leadership was being strongly encouraged to engage actively in the new trusteeship processes, with a view to managing the change ahead. 'Shadow' trust arrangements emerged during this decade some of which, in the first years of this century, became civil entities.<sup>32</sup> Some twenty plus small congregations began to meet regularly seeking ways of matching their story in the new emerging trusteeship models.<sup>33</sup> This period also included the preparation of legal options for the establishment of trusts and discussion on

property issues, as well as research on the costs involved in running education offices to support the trusteeship role in schools.

### Collaboration in Trusteeship:

The new century increasingly saw the need for formally establishing new trust arrangements and for trusts to work together in a variety of ways. With this in mind, in 2002, CORI set up the Interim Development Strategy (IDS) - a work group with a project officer to map out the practical elements needed for the formalisation of trusts. It identified five key areas for development:<sup>34</sup> Vision, External and Internal Communications, Legal and Property Issues and Trustee Representative Body and used the CEA structure to engage members as needed. An invitation to all religious by the Presentation and Mercy sisters in May 2002 to form one trust nationwide prompted much consideration and was an impetus to action generally. Eventually, this offer resulted in the setting up of CEIST as the trust body for over a hundred Secondary schools. Simultaneously, the Christian Brothers were developing what was to become the Edmund Rice Trust, a process that at one time involved the Presentation Brothers and Religious Sisters of Charity. These eventually became two independent trusts. Meantime, a number of individual congregations established civil trusts to secure the future of their school networks while retaining the juridic function internally within the congregation. A number of these 'independent trusts' continue to meet regularly<sup>35</sup> to share good practice, and indeed were the main source for a revised handbook for trustees, reflecting the changed legislation and context since 1996.<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, eleven congregations, now thirteen, formed the Le Chéile Trust with responsibility for almost sixty schools. A number of the new trusts such as ERST, CEIST and Le Chéile have sought both civil and canonical recognition for their new enterprise. In each development, a new sense of vision and mission has been forged through shared reflection and dialogue, not only between religious and new trustees, but within all sections of school communities. It has been in many cases a growth in partnership and journeying together.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the question of the future role of religious in schools had already been addressed in the F.I.R.E. Report in 1974, though from a different perspective.

<sup>32</sup> For example: M Des Places Schools Trust for schools in the trusteeship of the Spiritan Fathers, Loreto Schools Trust, Marist Schools Trust etc.. These were civilly incorporated while canonically remaining linked to the Congregations. Still later, new lay trusts were set up which were civilly incorporated and were given canonical approval in their becoming juridic persons recognised by Rome and the IEC Edmund Rice Schools Trust, (ERST),

Catholic Education Irish Schools Trust (CEIST), Le Chéile - a trust formed by 13 congregations. It is notable that no clerical trustees and just one congregation with fee paying schools have become part of shared joint trusteeship arrangements. Gender difference is noted in that in all cases of collaborative arrangements, the initiative came from female congregations.

<sup>33</sup> SCISIFT Small Congregations Interested in Sharing Ideas about the Future of Trusteeship - this group emerged led by Brid Roe O.P. c. 1999/2000 and was the nucleus of what became Le Chéile. Other members of this group continue to meet as part of the 'independent' trustees (F.O.C.U.S.S) group.

<sup>34</sup> Vision, External Communication, Legal and Property Issues, Internal Communication, Towards a Trustee Representative Body

<sup>35</sup> Federation of Congregations interested in Sharing Trusteeship Services (F.O.C.U.S.S)

<sup>36</sup> Education Commission, Conference of Religious of Ireland. *Guidelines on the role of Trustees in Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools*. Dublin: CORI, 2005)

A second strand towards collaborative trusteeship was the journey that culminated in the setting up of the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools in 2008. The initial impetus for this movement, which began in 2003 was the recognition of the common purpose of all Catholic schools' trusts, the duplication of certain services and the need for a strong sectoral partnership approach going forward. This was a fraught process, probably,<sup>37</sup> with hindsight, due to the broad spectrum of experience in developing their own trusteeship arrangements among the religious involved. There was, for example, resistance to any suggestion of mutual accountability arrangements and standardisation. For some, collaboration beyond a mutual support context was a step too far. For others, still in their journey of transferring their family story into a new trust group in an atmosphere of growing relinquishment and ongoing planning, theological reflection and dialogue, such collaboration in any guise was premature. There were differing perceptions of what such an umbrella body might achieve: a shared service provision, a lobbying and fund-seeking body, or a support to deliver quality Catholic schools. The autonomy and identity of each of the forty-three congregations involved in secondary school trusteeship was a legal reality, informing well-established habitus and influencing some new trusts more than others.<sup>38</sup> The ATCS now exists and can grow organically in response to the needs of the individual trusts and trustees. It is probably true that need alone will create any new vibrant structure among trustees and trust groups, and that possibly, the Catholic Schools Partnership, where the various interests of the Catholic school enterprise work together, is a better forum for collaboration and engagement with the strategic intent for Catholic Education.

An analysis of the constituencies and vested interests involved in the development of collaborative trusteeship arrangements is reminiscent of the begetting of what became the AMCSS in 1987,<sup>39</sup> where various levels of independence, interdependence and dependence among the various groups of women religious, brothers, lay owners and clerical CHA members eventually came together for the good of the whole.

<sup>37</sup> Three work groups sought to bring forward an acceptable template for agreement: the Trustee Representative Body 2002/4 which was professionally supported, the Transitional Trustee Representative Body, whose proposals were not agreed at the CORI 2005 AGM, leading in 2006 to an Educational Trust Body (ETB). A 'shadow' Trustee body came into existence in 2007, which, following a new initiative, made acceptable proposals leading to the creation of the ATCS in 2008.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to these 43 congregations, a further 9 have trusteeship interests in Primary, Community and Comprehensive schools in 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Doyle, Eileen: *Leading the Way Managing Voluntary Secondary Schools, Dublin Secretariat of Voluntary Secondary Schools*, 2000 pp. 68–72; 146–150; 157–160

## Towards a 'One Church' approach to Catholic Education

Traditionally, unlike their confreres in the U.S.A. and Australia, for example, Irish Bishops benefitted from the European model of school provision where new Catholic Secondary schools were funded, managed and generally owned by religious. Thus the canonical requirement on a bishop to provide for Catholic education was met by the religious. The diocesan colleges (minor seminaries) were different because they were the source of future candidates for the priesthood.<sup>40</sup>

The changing face of trusteeship in what were religious schools prompted ongoing negotiation with the bishops and Vatican officials. Two seminal meetings, involving all these parties were sponsored jointly by the IEC and CORI in Spring 2005 and November 2005. The February meeting led to the setting up of the Strategic Task Group for Education, the main purpose of which was to plan for the establishment of a Catholic Education Service. The November meeting focused on canonical approaches to new trusteeship models. A consultation meeting on these issues was later held with key stakeholders in February 2006.

## The Catholic Education Service

The Catholic Education Service, set up in 2010 following consultation and planning with all key partners in Catholic Education in 2009/10, is a joint IEC/CORI initiative that envisages strategically serving all dimensions of Catholic Education including schooling into the future. As such it is an umbrella body. To date, just two of its proposed elements have been developed: the Catholic Schools Partnership and the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education.

## Challenges/Future Possibilities/Explorations

Challenge and possibility are an inherent part of any living system and the following personal reflections, some posited as questions with some tentative answers, are in no way exhaustive:

1. The gift of religious communities to the mission of the Church has always needed new ways of situating itself in response to the signs of the times. How can new trust arrangements allow for this dynamic and see that trustee bodies are adequately formed, to be discerning decision-makers, policy-makers and risk-takers, in the light of the founding intention and

characteristic spirit, situated within the mission of the Church? New trusts need people with the wide-ranging skills necessary for the maintenance and promotion of the schools in their charge. They are being requested to translate historical values to current situations, to have a capacity for ambiguity and system thinking, to be self-reliant with a commitment to win-win, as well as to have a personal sense (public or apostolic) of spirituality or centredness. One of the challenges for trusts may be to continue to be resourced by such people. Are religious/Church parent bodies looking at ways to offer formation and ongoing support to enhance this journey for these pilgrims in their historic networks?

2. **Ethos:** Ethos cannot be imposed but is promoted and is at its best integrated into all areas of school life. This is a primary responsibility of trustees and informs school planning, which trustees have a statutory responsibility and right to inform. How can they achieve this? Trustees need to ensure an ongoing corpus of school-based people who will be the primary in-school carriers and interpreters of ethos in collaboration with trustees and their school community. Principals cannot carry this in isolation. Could groups of trustees assure this training in a general way, similar to the arrangements around the joint training of Boards of Management between trustee groupings and the AMCSS/JMB, and then offer their individual perspective on ethos in the context of the generic school ethos received? It might also usefully be a dimension pursued in the context of training facilitators and co-ordinators of School Development Planning. In conjunction with the DES self-evaluation instrument *Looking at our School*, might not trustees also help schools identify the key indicators of an inherited ethos for development and ownership within the school community at a given time? This could become the basis for ongoing support and dialogue in the translation of a meaningful expression of ethos in each school community. It is probably best that the promotion of ethos is not the preserve of R.E. teachers, notwithstanding their professional aptitude and sympathy for its promotion and integration. They are an integral part of it but to reduce ethos to a subset of R.E. is an injustice and deprives the school of a central part of its life and soul.
3. **Role clarity:** Schools are managed by Boards of Management as defined in the Articles of Management for Secondary Schools. They are served in many ways by the JMB/AMCSS. How can trustee groupings ensure they do not duplicate these already existing services but work in collaboration

with these established and recognised bodies? Such duplication is a poor use of resources, undermines healthy partnerships between management and trustee bodies and may be unsustainable.

4. **Board of Management Appointments by Trustees:** Trustees appoint all board members including the chair and nominate four of the eight appointees. Boards manage schools on behalf of the trustees and in compliance with civil legislation and trustee mandates. Hence, input from trustees should normally be through the board only. How can trustees ensure a panel of suitable and willing board members, especially for those to be nominated by them? Can trustees identify and interview prospective trustee nominees to Boards of Management to establish their suitability for appointment by them. In the U.K. one occasionally sees advertisements inviting applications for consideration as trustee nominees / foundation members on boards. In all cases, training and ongoing support are subsequently offered to appointees as it is neither good practice nor realistic to assume that appointees have internalised the trustee perspective, simply through an appointment process. In appointing their nominees, trustees should clearly define certain current key trustee issues of concern and engagement, as part of the process of having nominees accept appointment. Equally, trustees need to be part of the ongoing training of boards as corporate entities.
5. **System management and communication:** How can trustees ensure good communication between foundation religious trustees, themselves and schools? The importance of having systems in place and adhering to them is self-evident. This allows for necessary communication channels and authority lines and mandates. One of the most obvious areas of close shared interest between trustees and school is that of property as to date, few foundation religious trustees have transferred the ownership of school property, often on a shared campus, to the new trusts, though such may be envisaged by some trusts in the future. However, here as elsewhere, good boundaries make for good neighbours.
6. **Voluntary Secondary School – State Relationships:** Some consideration might be given by trustees acting together, to the relationship of the Voluntary Secondary school with the State. Since opting for the 'Free Education Scheme' as a service to their country in 1967, the majority of these schools are now largely dependent on public monies for staffing, and increasingly, if not fully, for capital funding and capitation and other grants.

In a sense they are both 'private' and 'public' schools. The relationship may need to be revisited in a spirit of mutuality, respect, equity of funding and fairness and an understanding of pluralism that is not a 'one size fits all' nor one modelled on the French and Czech understanding of secularity/'laïcité' in public life including schools,<sup>41</sup> but rather a pluralism that recognises the right to the existence of contradictory truth claims as in atheism, Christianity and Islam, for example.<sup>42</sup> Sadly, Church leadership at the time of the introduction of 'Free Education' sought few if any protections for ethos and Religious Education from the State, as part of an arrangement for so readily supporting this much welcomed mass schooling development and for giving the use of their school buildings and lands. In many cases, they also accepted a reduced charge per pupil, compared to the former fee level applied. Practical support by the State for, and respectful recognition by it of ethos, on the basis of its integrity and acknowledged value in adding capacity to school outcomes and well being, might be pursued into the future. This and the provision of remunerated chaplaincy co-ordination services. The principle of chaplaincy services in state-owned schools is well established and on the basis of equality of provision for pupils, ought to be available in some way to all pupils regardless of school type.

- 7. Associates:** Northern Ireland expects soon to have a State grant-aided Trustee Support Service for Catholic Schools (and other school sectors also). It is hoped to be in a position to 'sell' services to other schools/sectors as well as buy them in. The advantages of this approach are manifold. It allows for a wider use of skills base in the delivery of services, with many professionals/associates doing piecework on a short or long term basis, with contracts offered for the completion of the specific task. This allows for greater specialisation in school provision and development, property planning, ethos, education, governance, personnel, finance, management, strategic planning and mission integrity. In time it may well be that Catholic education is rationalised and that a larger organisation will be in place to employ and deploy specialists for such positions but that is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Ideally, this kind of service also promotes a self-governing school with maximised accountability for its resources and outcomes.<sup>43</sup> A variant of this model might be developed in Ireland by trustees/trust directors to

provide the desired services to schools. The specialists/associates would come from a panel selected through a competition by the Board, seeking services under a range of headings such as above for example. If this were to be done successfully, directors and members would need to meet and proactively engage in the decision-making around the core values to underpin each activity, agreed from those proposed by the directors. This would need to be done in a practical, meticulous and tangible way so that a parallel evaluation process would become part of the trust company practice and role. Obviously such a model would need an executive director (on a full or part time basis depending on the number of schools included in a trust grouping) working closely with the Board of Directors. Alternatively, it could be assured by an executive chairperson, functioning in the same manner as the associates/specialists.

- 8. Sustainability:** Trusts are not part of the public service and have finite often non-renewable resources. Their practices must reflect this reality. The services to schools on behalf of trusts need as far as possible to be slim and flexible, able to respond to emerging and constantly changing contexts. Might these be more efficiently fulfilled by short term contracts, where amendments can readily be made in the light of evaluations of work completed and needs identified, without the pitfalls of long-term full-time contractual obligations? Such practices might not only serve the short-term aims of the trusts, but would also be less expensive making existing resources available for longer periods. It would, however, call for much dedication and intimate involvement by Directors and Executive director / chairperson, in the processes for providing an effective, efficient Trustee service to schools.
- 9. Voluntarism:** Voluntarism has ever been part of the Christian's expression of faith commitment and this is certainly true of the many thousands involved in the voluntary sector on Boards of Management. Is there a way in which more people can be encouraged to offer their particular professional expertise to school trusteeship for the service of Catholic education? This could be done pro bono or on a stipendiary basis, by people seeking to offer meaningful service and live out their baptismal call? This would involve strong commitment equal to that of the remunerated professional and is commonplace in many EU countries.

<sup>41</sup> Burleigh, M. *Sacred Causes – Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda*, London: Harper Perennial, 2007

<sup>43</sup> O'Sullivan, H., West-Burnham J., *Leading and Managing Schools*, London: Sage 2011

<sup>42</sup> Drumm, M. quoted in Irish Times, March 17th 2011 from address at Iona Institute Conference on 'A Future for Faith Schools?' Dublin, March 2012.

**10. Church Links:** What is the role and relationship of schools and trusts to the Church and its mission – locally, diocesan, nationally and globally? How does the Church, in turn, continue to endorse these schools and trusts? Some parts of Belgium, France, the U.S.A. and Australia, for example, have developed collaborative protocols and practices to situate Voluntary Catholic Secondary schools within the context of their particular trust and the wider Church. Some exploration of these experiences might be helpful.

**11. Collaboration among Trustee Groupings:** Since its inception in 2009, Catholic Schools Week has involved Ethos and R.E. animation personnel from the larger Trust groups in the planning and preparation of materials. The idea of each voluntary school celebrating a 'legacy' and/or patron day during that week has been promoted. This is an example of strength in working together. All schools are the same, similar and different.

ATCS has begun the task of working on behalf of Trustee interests and is now recognised by the State as the representative body for school trustees. As such, it was invited to make a submission to the recent Forum on Primary School Patronage. It is a young body whose constituents have varied histories. It seems important that all trusts and trustees make every effort to maximise collaboration and together develop ATCS as part of the Catholic Education Service, in the interests of a vibrant, sustainable Catholic schools sector in an increasingly diverse and secular Ireland. This includes jointly agreeing to make some hard decisions around new schools, consolidation and rationalisation in a changing context of choice and changing demographic patterns.

This article has sought to track the journey of the current and emerging trusteeship arrangements for Catholic Voluntary Secondary schools in Ireland over the past twenty five years. In so doing, it also points to some of the many challenges and opportunities facing this sector of schools. The aim throughout has been to ensure a strategy that seeks 'the creation of organisational possibilities that will allow us to react opportunistically to whatever happens'<sup>44</sup> for the vibrancy of the Catholic school system as it develops, in a culture of mediation and partnership, as a school sector among others serving the common good.

MICHAEL REDMOND

## School Principals – Warriors, Worriers and Wellbeing



Michael Redmond, a former principal of two Dublin secondary schools, has been Research and Development Officer for the Joint Managerial Body since September 2009. His role includes educational and management research, presentation of reports and position papers on key issues, advising school boards and management, meeting with the education partners and providing information and reports for Council and for the General Secretary. Michael also works on behalf of JMB in a wide variety of educational areas including special educational needs, curriculum development, intercultural education, inclusion, disadvantage initiatives and ICT in schools.

He is currently undertaking a Doctorate in Education with the Open University.

*'Leadership is fundamentally about emotional engagement and involvement.'*

*Harris, 2007*

*'We need much more than emotional acumen to tackle the inadequacies of modern education.'*

*Morrison and Ecclestone, 2011*

The world, thank God, is divided. For every voice proclaiming a new certainty, another, in time, will emerge to create healthy dissonance and afflict the comfortable. The emotional landscape of school leadership has become just such a battleground in the 21st century, polarised around the classic 'nature vs nurture' argument as well as the paradigm wars of how to investigate the affective nature of the human condition.

What's clear, however, is that we need an antidote to the reductionism of the 20th century whereby body, mind and spirit; family, community and society, have all been dissected, separated, analysed and left unrestored. As individuals, school communities and as a society, we are crying out for authentic holism and deep renewal. Whatever one's stance on the role and place of emotionality in principalship, there can be little argument that it merits some serious restorative attention and this article attempts to outline elements of the current discourse and offer an Irish voluntary secondary school context to the debate.

Let me declare my bias at the outset. Fourteen years of principalship has left me convinced of the truth of an assertion by Chris James that 'Schools are emotional theatres par excellence and leadership in those schools is therefore an emotional practice' (James and Vince, 2001). Since joining the Secretariat, I have been researching this field and engaging with reflective and generous principals across the country who have both reinforced some of my thinking and also challenged my occasionally cosy Golemanite tendencies.

This is their story.

### Where principals are at

Civic discourse around teachers and teaching is currently quite toxic. Attitudes to the public service and media bias apart, the perception that 'those who can't – teach' has never been challenged in any meaningful way by teachers, united by a clear and strong professional identity. School leadership, often an isolated and isolating role, similarly needs to assert itself for its demanding yet vital place in the local and societal tasks we face.

As the 'principal voice' quotes below will illustrate, the high level of commitment to their schools on the part of principals and the fact that 'the task of leadership is fundamentally person centred', (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2011), leads to a blurring of the distinction between the personal and the professional. School leaders are facing a daunting series of adaptive personal and role-based challenges brought on by the seismic 'shakings' of a uniquely insidious financial crisis, a reformation of Catholic identity, a mismatch between the inherited factory model of schooling and the demands of post-modern education and a failure of successive governments to grapple with the anachronistic, and now disintegrating, middle-management structure of voluntary secondary schools. The flood of those exiting an otherwise worthwhile and fulfilling job points to the dilemma posed by Michael Fullan; 'If effective principals energise teachers in complex times, what is going to energise principals?' (Fullan, 2007).

In education at least, we are finally beginning to withdraw from our addiction to instant solutions and formulaic approaches to school effectiveness and school improvement. Our response must surely lie in becoming what we already are – ever more fully human, ever more relational and ever more truly spiritual. For us, our schools and indeed our country, deep renewal is called for at this time. 'Data gathering and trying harder are important but holistic school renewal means a wholesale reinvention of what it means to live and learn, teach and lead in today's and tomorrow's schools' (Beatty, 2007).

Anything else is tinkering.

'Schools are powerhouses of emotion' (Harris, 2007) and the psychological and behavioural impacts of the 'repetitive change injury' syndrome to which we have been exposed in the past decade must surely demand that school leaders 'put

their own oxygen masks on first in a mid-air crisis' and pay serious attention to their own psychological, spiritual, physical and emotional fitness. That these elements of wellbeing are intricately interconnected is, or should be, obvious. That overwhelmed principals may be compelled to neglect some or all of these very foundations, is also apparent to anyone working to support our school leaders at this time.

Listening closely to the personal narrative offered by voluntary secondary principals is, I believe, an important tool in uncovering the wide range of coping, growing and leading mechanisms adopted by this unique set of individuals across the country.

### Voices From the Frontlines

In accessing 'principal voice' in group, individual and online settings for the past two years, I have been surprised and much gratified by the openness, frankness and richness of commentary offered by school leaders on this otherwise personal, private and subjective topic.

An online survey, carried out in 2011, attracted contributions from over 170 busy principals and, along with interview and focus group outcomes, offers an insight into the affective realm of voluntary secondary school leadership at this time.

First, some background data, in chart form, to frame the range of respondents:

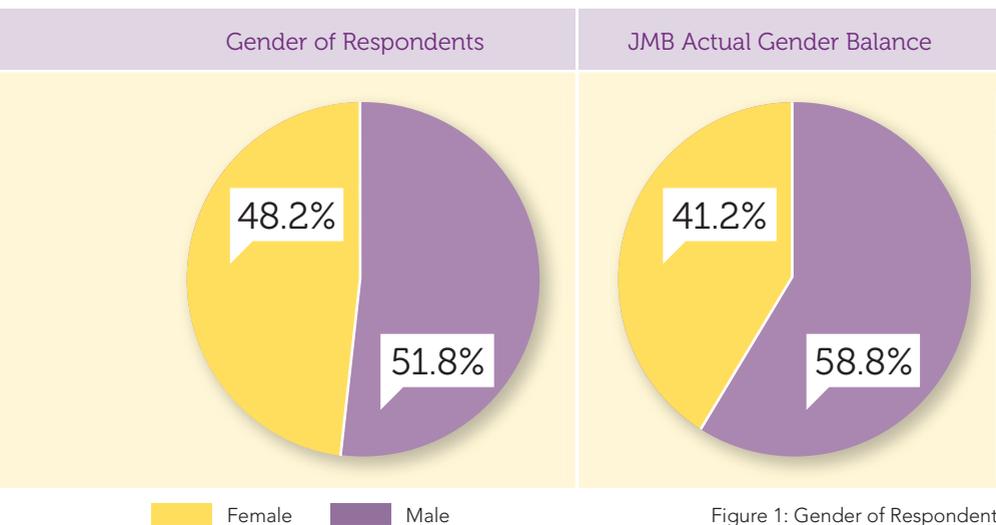


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

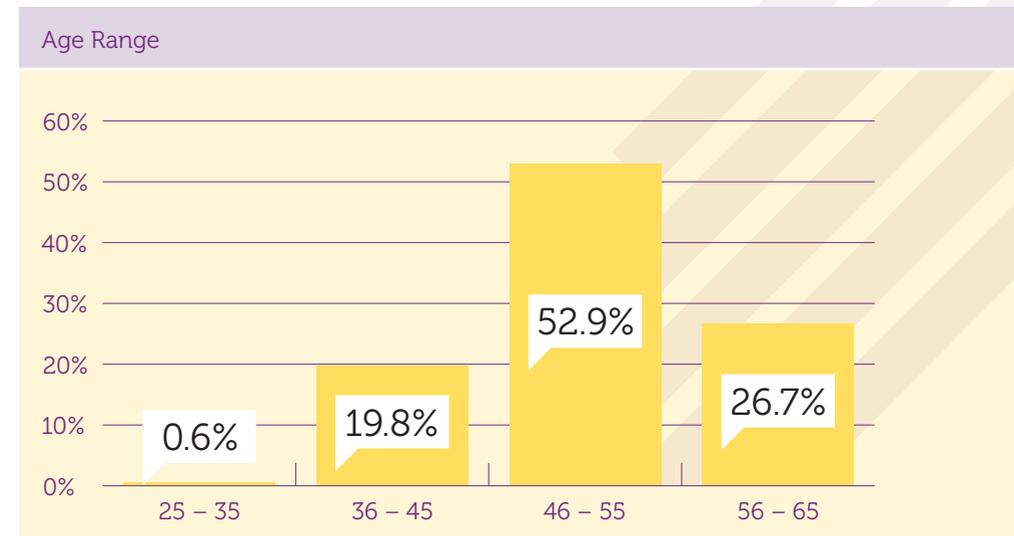


Figure 2: Age Range of Respondents

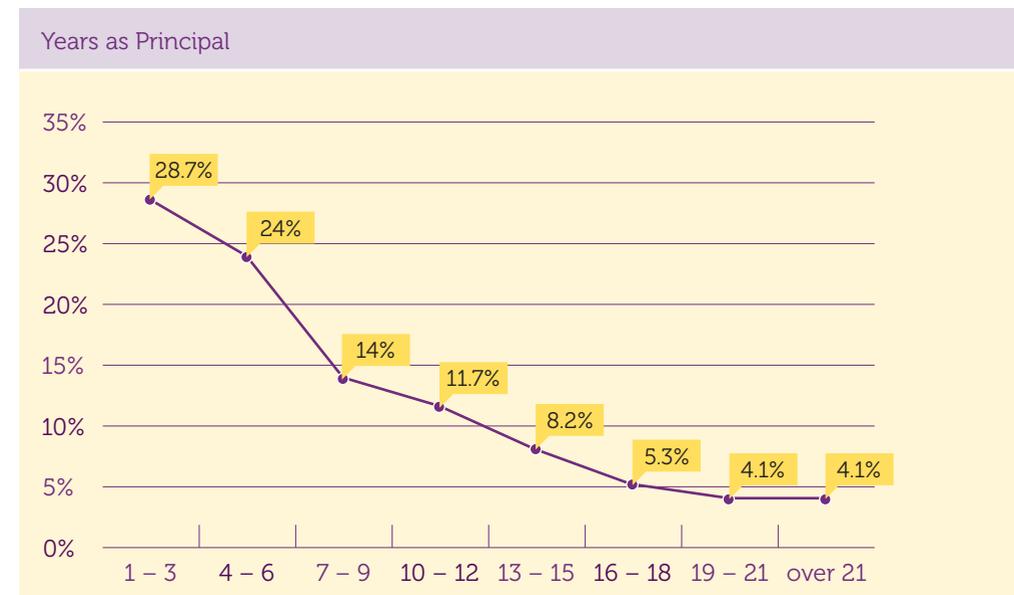


Figure 3: Length of Service as Principal

### Self-Identified Leadership Style

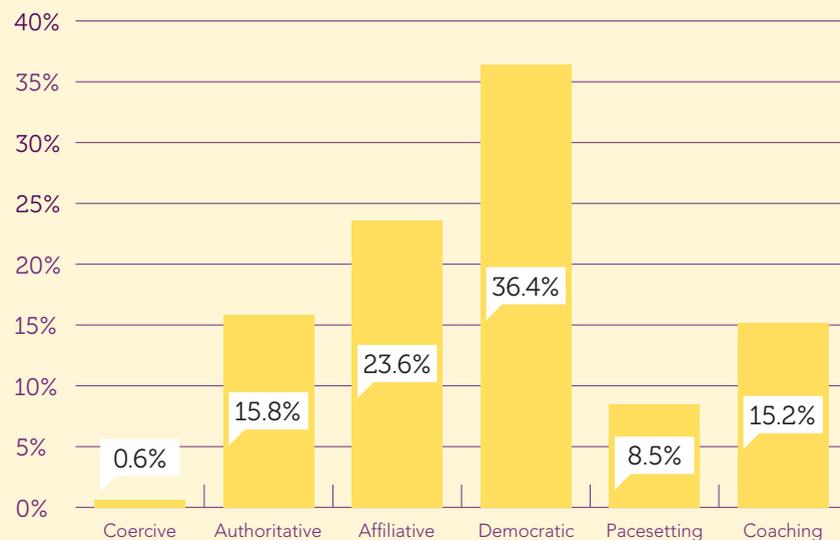


Figure 4: Leadership Styles

In February 2011, I asked our current cohort of principals to respond to a series of interview extracts using both Likert Scale feedback and commentary. Some of their over 1,000 comments are shared here.

#### On the Busyness...

- This is exactly what I enjoy about the job
- Principals need to be social workers, educational psychologists, family mediators, solicitors, first aid specialists, technological experts and 'good listeners' to deal with the range of difficulties presented on any given day. There is an expectation from students, parents and especially staff that the principal does not have any 'difficulties' or 'bad days' and should always be 'available'!
- In a DEIS School a lot of interaction with parents, pupils and teachers. A lot of emotional interactions every day.

#### On a Place For Emotionality in School...

- Schools are 'people places' and the emotional climate is one of the key nurturing aspects of education for students.
- I have learned that I need to distance myself from an immediate response if possible - to allow the emotions to calm down, and look at the situation logically and with a more "professional" eye. I manage to do this 60% of the time!!
- Compassion and understanding are needed but sometimes my head has to call the shots.

#### On Interrupted Sleep...

- Getting better at this one, but I still think of school a lot even when off.
- Took me a while to get over this. Thought I was weird at the beginning but discovered many principals were like me.
- Difficult to switch off even when asleep!
- Am getting better! Have sought expert advice - medical and psychological!!
- Have been like this for 12 years – facing burnout now.

#### On the Impact on Family...

- I have two children in exam years. Last week I was 58 hours on the premises not counting work I did at home. Something has to give!
- Very difficult as a working mum with children
- Family has undoubtedly suffered from time to time. Certainly school has never suffered at the hands of family.
- I noticed my kids getting older as their vocabulary on the phone to me improved!
- I'm a religious!

#### On Who I Talk to...

- I have been banned from talking about school at home! Sometimes I just can't hold it in though.
- I don't talk at home as much as I used to but I notice my husband still knows the names of my 'special boys'
- The only people who really understand the demands, the toll, (and also the positive challenge and "buzz" and feeling of achievement) is another Principal
- I was blessed to have a few principals who semi adopted me.
- Spouse = principal also

### On Taking Exercise...

- Physical exercise and wellbeing are very important in maintaining a healthy and well balanced approach to work.
- I wish I could but sometimes it's so late when I get in and then I have to get dinner and just try to make the house a home. It's hard.
- I wish!
- In theory exercise is brilliant. However, sometimes I just like to be rebellious! A glass of wine is nice too!
- That happened once in 2009!

### On Linking Emotional Capacities With School Improvement...

- Logic doesn't get you far in dealing with many people.
- Need to be able to read people well, know how to approach an issue with them and how to get them on side.
- Need to learn this one and to be careful with it. I always feel that one has to be honest, that one is not manipulating human emotions merely for power, but that the common good of the school is the reason.
- Schools are complex and sailed rather than driven.

### On Doing 'Little Things' For People to Achieve School Improvement ...

- This is rather negative stuff Michael! One learns to value a staff and affirmation is very important. People do things because they feel they are contributing, you must acknowledge this and if one takes ethos seriously then it comes naturally.
- This is a very dangerous route to take. It's bribery and corruption by another name. Everything you do as a leader has to be for the better good and deviousness may get the results in the short term but rarely in the long term. Leaders need to be authentic and fair and be good judges. This behaviour exhibits none of these characteristics.
- Small things like this help but it's also leadership that will direct the improvement

### On Getting too Worked-Up Over Things...

- Learning from past mistakes... age and experience are valuable
- Not now but I took ownership of messes in the early days that were not of my making.

- Try very hard to be clever on this one. Have had to learn to let it go.
- I've had a few tough weeks with staff recently. I learned a lot from it. Yes, I did get worked up but it caused me to reflect over Christmas and to address the staff when we came back. I consulted books on leadership and reflected on what I might need to do to get people on board without losing my dignity. I can see now that I tend to withhold too much of my personal self and my weaknesses.

### On Keeping Up School Morale...

- As principal I have to do what I can to keep morale in this school up.
- Can all get a bit gloomy at present. Nothing like a pay cut to make people feel undervalued.
- This is what leaders must do. That's why we need leaders. They lead for the good.
- These extracts are so loaded! You always had to do that - this too shall pass!
- Keep smiling!

### On Empathy...

- I believe in this statement in my personal dealings with staff members. I would go the extra mile for a person in a one-to-one situation. However, I believe that dealing with staff issues and school issues must be done on a professional and objective basis with clear, fair and objective procedures - where possible.
- Especially with parents
- Yes but you must try to be empathetic to all. Not just to the cute cuddly ones! That's the challenge.

### On Probing For Emotional Competencies at Principalship Interview...

- Yes - if you have emotionally intelligent interviewers!
- Any more probing and it would be difficult to get principals to take the job.
- But on appointment one section of the JMB training should focus on how to best develop emotional intelligence and how best to use it to protect your sanity and [reduce] stress levels.
- This is more important than academic qualifications or experience.
- But how...?

### On Teaching Empathy...

- Help rather than teach.
- Can't teach someone empathy.
- I think you can give structured opportunities for reflection. Not touchy feely platitudes but rigorous self reflection.
- I have seen changes among colleagues here which 10 years ago I would never have believed. I feel strongly that if those in leadership can operate on the basis of respectful and empathetic relationships then this will permeate others.
- Not sure about this. Prospective principals need to understand the role and a lot of this comes with on the job experience.

### Some Last Words...

- This is the first time in a long time I took time out to reflect on where I was going. It was very insightful and most helpful. Thanks.
- The Irish education system is 'killing' its Principals. I know that word is a bit dramatic, but I think the demands of the role, with no resourcing, have become inhuman. The sad part is that I have seen the same issues, problems, pressures and stresses come up almost since the year I was appointed as Principal – except they have worsened. Trustees, JMB, Boards of Management must take their responsibility for 'duty of care' of Principals...
- *Hate this type of survey!*

### The Personal Story

Ciarán Sugrue (Sugrue, 2005), citing Goodson points out that 'in very few instances have school reforms or change theories been promulgated which place personal development and change as central building blocks in the process' (Goodson, 2003). Indeed, he goes on to argue that this personal insider perspective has been seen as a 'stumbling block' rather than a 'building block' and that a life-history approach has much potential to provide insight into principals' identities and capacities.

A single interview with a principal recently elicited some key perspectives rooted in the personal story that may illustrate one person's attempt to navigate the affective landscape of school leadership and sustain wellbeing. As principals very often listen to and validate other principals, there may (or may not) be some lessons here!

### Emotional

MR: Would you see an emotional dimension to your professional work?

P2: Huge

MR: Huge?

P2: Yes, absolutely

MR: How aware of it are you on an hour-by-hour basis?

P2: Very. I have to be emotionally in a good place, otherwise things don't go well for me and I can see the ripple effects on other people as well ... I can see it myself and, you know, it's the day that suddenly the glass is half-empty or everything's wrong. I had a day like that on Monday and then yesterday was so much better. Nothing had changed – the only thing that had changed was my attitude towards it ... and the space I was in.

### Physical

MR: Are you an outside-in person, in terms of building yourself up? You know, would you be conscious of treating yourself to something for example?

P2: Yes ... I love ...going into that space, you know.. be it massages or my daily walks. Like I was at the gym at seven o'clock this morning and I feel so much better for it, and it's not exercise because the amount of exercise that I do is minimal ...it's just that exertion and just to distract yourself...

### Spiritual

MR: Would you say there's a spiritual dimension to your thinking around your role, or is it human and experiential?

P2: There is a spiritual dimension because I've a strong faith but I don't think it's unique. I think what I do, you can apply to any situation, you know? I happen to have God at the centre of what I do with the students and our mission statement and core values but you could do it without mentioning God in it at all.

### Meaning

Minding gives meaning to what I'm doing.

### The Recession

I was in school in the 1980's and I had a really amazing principal. And I remember her making a statement at one stage – that was the mid-eighties, where there were no parent teacher meetings, there were all these strikes, these actions and all of that. And I remember her making a comment one day, she said "No recession! I'm not going to allow any recession to impact on my students".

I've used that with my students here and I have to say to my staff time and time again 'It's not our students who caused this recession' and that would be a real defining approach to me in terms of how I manage things.

So I try not to talk things down, I talk them up.

### The Negative Wizards

...and they're the type that, you know, you have everywhere... no matter how much you do, it's not going to be enough for them, but what I do find far better for me is engaging. I'll go in and I'll sit with them at the table. There's only four or five of them. I've them in every committee in here – I bring them in...

I've moved the furniture around them and I've chopped out some of their trees and I gave them new trees to go up, you know, but I can't really change them. And then I get angry with myself for knowing 'I can't change them so why are you wasting negative energy letting them upset you?'

### Self Awareness

Oh... I definitely think anybody going into the role needs to know themselves... know their strengths, their weaknesses and have been in a situation in some way in their professional life where they have been challenged.

You know, I feel if you're not in touch with your own emotions, how on earth are you going to handle other people?

### Other Awareness

I'd sometimes say 'Oh my God, I can't do this, where am I going? I'm useless, I'm not able to do this' and suddenly I could bark at everyone. Even the students could tell when I walk into assembly. Yesterday they said "you're in good form today".

You know... people see it in you – we see it in other people. Every morning I meet the students coming in – myself and the deputy; she might be outside the gate, I'd be inside... I can tell, I know them... coming in every morning I can tell by the look on their face what's going on and sometimes I only have to put my hand on their shoulder and they'll break down – "come on up to the office". You know, you can see it in people...

### The Focus...

MR: What are you conscious of in terms of the emotional conditions in your school, that you create?

P2: Oh, a caring, happy, supportive environment...

MR: And you intentionally work on those?

P2: Absolutely. I do, I do.

### Looking to the Future: Self & School Actualisation

On closer examination of the survey commentaries, a polarisation of stance on emotion in principalship immediately began to emerge between statements representing agreement with the contention that 'emotion is inherent in the practice of leadership rather than separate from it' (Crawford, 2007) and opposing voices concurring with the conclusion that 'highly effective school leaders may need more than the smooth operation of emotional intelligence' (O'Connor, 2004). In an exercise at 'theoretical playfulness', I adopted a heuristic device identifying two categories of statement, 'Worriers' and Warriors' respectively.

It subsequently became clear that each category of comment could be classed as either an emotional *resource*, possessed by the principal, or an emotionally-informed *condition* created in the school under the influence of the leader.

There emerged seven Resources and six Conditions and the number of original commentary extracts within each, provided quantification of the relative 'strengths' of each characteristic.

The *Resources* Identified by Respondent Principals Emerged as:

1. Authenticity
2. Conflict Management
3. Emotional Awareness
4. Relationship Building
5. Resilience
6. Values
7. Wellbeing

The *School Conditions* the Commentaries Elicited were:

1. Care-Giving
2. Change Managing
3. Communicating
4. Contextualising
5. Problem Solving
6. Trust Building

There is little scope to expand on the emergence of this outcome here and its limitations are many but the eventual results, illustrated in the charts to the right, nonetheless offer some potential for describing and comprehending the relative weight given by 'Worriers' and 'Warriors' to the emotional factors presenting in school life.

This analysis has supported the emergence of a simple model, within which the outcomes identified to the right can be given some coherence.

Personal Emotional Resources as identified & prioritised by 'Warriors' and 'Worriers'



Figure 5

School Emotional Conditions as identified & prioritised by 'Warriors' and 'Worriers'

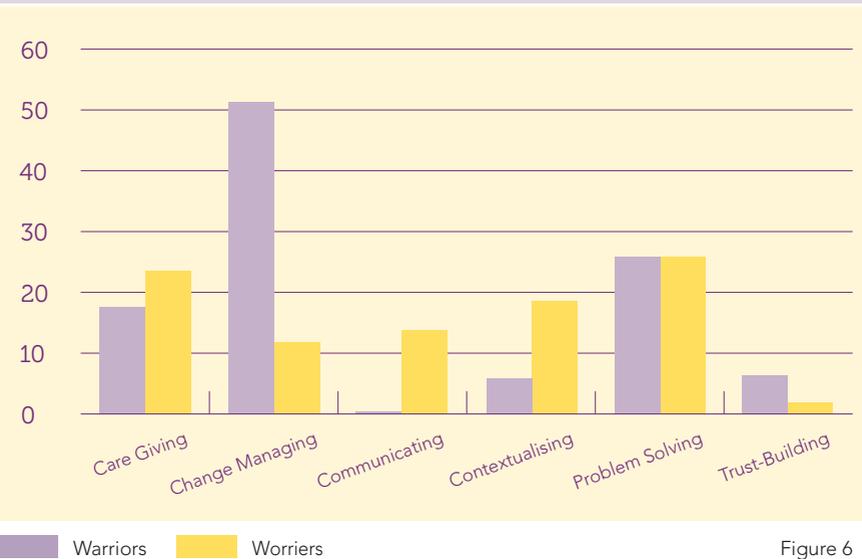


Figure 6

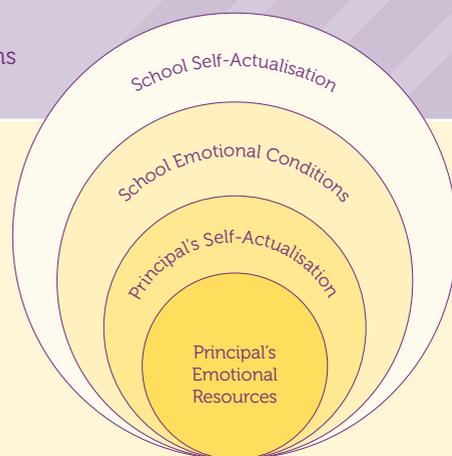
Though not well developed in the literature, the notion that ‘over time, all schools develop a unique personality that is built up as people solve problems, cope with tragedies and celebrate successes’ (Schein, 1985) has potential to support a concept based on the idea of self actualisation. If personal self actualisation can be defined as ‘man’s tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities... to express and activate all the capacities of the organism’ (Rogers, 1961) then the school, an ‘organism’ with its own unique personality, may similarly have a capacity for actualisation.

If ‘real transformation of schools... involves a commitment to self actualisation as a process of moment-by-moment change’ (Harris, 2007) there may exist, as outlined in Figure 7, a nested interdependence between the principal’s emotional resources supporting his or her self-actualisation and the creation of the emotional conditions essential for school renewal, leading to a realisation of its own unique potentialities.

The implications for practice may therefore centre on the importance of principals ‘keeping in touch with their emotional selves and of keeping a check, albeit unsuccessfully at times, on their emotional well-being’ (O’Connor, 2004). It is also important that leadership programmes pay more attention to ‘a coherent and credible ‘fit’ between the outer presentation of self and one’s inner world of thoughts and feelings’ (Harris, 2007).

### Modelling linkage between emotional resources, conditions & actualisation

Figure 7



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SHEILA KELLEHER



Sheila Kelleher is a Presentation sister and Principal of Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane, Cork since 1986. She was a ministerial appointee on both the Task Force on Student Behaviour and on the committee on Educational Disadvantage. She worked on the Multiple Intelligence theory, under the direction of Professor Áine Hyland, attending the MI summer school with Howard Gardner at Harvard University in 1990. It was a great honour for her school to be named the overall winners of the all Island Schools Choir competition in 2010 and the it@cork Leaders Award for Excellence in Education in 2011. She is currently completing a Masters in Christian Leadership in Education and believes it is a privilege to lead a Catholic school in an era of unprecedented change.

# Leading and Managing the Catholic School in an Era of Unprecedented Change

While there is overlap and interdependence in the functions of leadership and management, they are nevertheless, identified as being separate, if intertwined areas of responsibility for school principals. Kotter (1990) agrees with this stating that

*'... leadership and management differ in terms of their primary function. The first can produce useful change, the second can create orderly results which keep something working efficiently' (p.7).*

Management is regarded as involving the sphere of activity which attends to the immediate practicalities of running a school in terms of organisation, the use of resources, curriculum provision and legal compliance, all in the interest of maintaining an ordered and efficient school. Leadership, on the other hand, includes all that is implied in management but also refers to that aspect of school governance which imagines a vision for a created future. Leadership has an inspirational dimension derived from one's fundamental values and goes beyond efficient management to enable positive transformation. It is about values and exerting influence, all of which give guidance and direction to any organisation. However, a Catholic school is no ordinary organisation but a very special place where Gospel values underpin everything and the presence and power of the Risen Lord are tangible. In the school, the leader is the person who is constantly searching for the high ground, 'it is the leader who engages in that creative activity in which horizons of meaning surrounding the issue at hand are perpetually stretched'. (Kavanagh, 1993, p.15).

Many authors argue that there can be good management and an absence of good leadership but not vice versa as good leadership is all embracing. Kavanagh (1993) states that 'it is sometimes said that management 'well done' is leadership in disguise. Nonetheless, good managers abound while good leaders are much less numerous' (p.13).

For leadership to be effective it must be capable of communicating the vision which will inspire, motivate and encourage others to strive for its attainment, thus bridging the gap between the present and the future. School leadership must operate out of an understanding that dimensions of human behaviour such as emotions, values and relationships with other people, are powerful and essential sources of motivation, because it is generally accepted that the Catholic school should be guided by a set of agreed shared values and beliefs. This type of leadership builds on, and is an expansion of the more traditional type of leadership which is equated with good management and differentiates true leaders from managers. Sergiovanni (1992) argues that by expanding leadership

to encompass the human dimension through a public declaration of values and purpose, schools can be transformed into communities where teachers are self-managers and professionalism is held up as an ideal.

The leadership of the Catholic school is modelled on the leadership of Jesus Christ who was the supreme leader, the leader 'par excellence' "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" John 14:6. The leadership of Jesus is about integrity, justice, love, forgiveness and service to others. It is about the spirit rather than the letter of the law and this is evident in many incidents in the Gospel when the Scribes and Pharisees tested Jesus, questioning him on adhering to the law. Consequently, the real challenge for the leader today is to be able to integrate the letter of the law with the life-giving spirit in a manner which is consistent with the characteristic spirit, ethos and culture of the Catholic school.

No particular style of leadership can claim a monopoly in terms of being the perfect style, leading to improved school performance and student achievement. The style of leadership varies from one situation to another but the essence of good leadership is the ability to judge what style of leadership will be appropriate and effective in a given situation and context and the ability to operate out of that style. Sergiovanni (1984) and Starrat (1986) talk about 'leadership forces' and 'elements' of the paradigm of leadership, all of which are in constant dynamic interaction. Examples of such 'leadership forces' and 'elements' are as follows:

- Vision
- Shared Vision
- Symbol
- Culture
- Transformation
- Celebration
- Educational
- Human
- Technical

(Kavanagh, 1993, pp.18-19)

## Symbol & Vision

Sergiovanni's (1984) contention is that the major symbol in a school is the person of the leader and, specifically in the Catholic school, the leader's ability to model goals of behaviour that signal a vision to others of what has meaning and value. He also contends that the Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational programme (p.9).

Likewise, Kavanagh (1993) claims that

*'The hopes and aspirations of the school community are embodied symbolically in the principal.... It is almost universally true that the climate and ethos of a Catholic school will reflect the leadership of the principal' (p.121).*

Mc Laughlin et al (1996) are even more adamant in their contention that everything hinges on the leader, who 'gives Catholic education a distinctive aim and character in which all aspects are related to Christ and an attempt is made to assist pupils to achieve a synthesis of faith, culture and life' (p.141).

Sergiovanni (1994) argues that the leader must be guided by a clear vision which is both inspiring and compelling, stating that 'vision is an educational platform, an inspiring, compelling dream, reflecting high ideals, clarifying purpose and inspiring enthusiasm' (p.96). But it's not enough for the leader alone to have a vision; while it might initially begin with the leader, there must be a sense of ownership of the vision by everyone if it is to become a reality. The ability of the leader to share the vision is the first step to success and Sergiovanni (1990) states that the shared vision becomes a 'shared covenant that bonds together leader and follower in a moral commitment' (p.24). Murphy (2007) shares this view and argues for the development of a shared vision 'it is rare to see a clearly defined vision articulated by a leader at the top of the hierarchy and then installed by followers' (p.54). It is the responsibility then of the leader not only to have a vision or to share the vision but to keep it alive and to lead by example, which will encourage others to live the vision in a way that 'articulates their hopes and dreams, touches their hearts and spirits and helps them to see how they can contribute' (Blanchard, 2009, p.30).

Sergiovanni (1984) and Starrat (1986) go on to state that

*'our most successful principals have devoted considerable time and energy to the development of relationships and an environment in which individuals are not afraid to take risks ... Perhaps most important they have created frequent opportunities for staff to discuss and clarify their values and beliefs, which has ultimately led to a feeling of shared purpose' (Kavanagh, 1993, p.20).*

## Celebration

One of the 'elements' of the Catholic school, mentioned by Sergiovanni and Starrat, is celebration. In the Catholic school, we regularly celebrate the Word made Flesh and the Paschal Mystery. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, we become 'eucharist' for everyone we meet and in doing so make the Gospel a living reality. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1998) supports this view:

*'the religious dimension of the school climate is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, in friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships and in ready availability' (pp.5-6).*

## Learning Centred Leaders

Another aspect of leadership is the effect it has on teaching and learning with all research and school inspection findings pointing to the fact that the principal, as leader of learning 'has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction' (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p.4). Learning-centred leaders are powerful role models and an inspiration to their staffs, who respect them as such and understand that the leader wants to make a difference and raise expectations.

Recognising, therefore, that the leader is critical to the performance of the school, ESHA (2008), in its Mission Statement states that 'school heads can and should make a difference within their schools by leading and motivating staff members and students' (p.1).

This view is supported by Bennis (1996) who argues that

*'leaders are people who have a strong sense that they can make a difference and that they want to make a difference. In particular, they are people who are self-directed and reflective. They are intense listeners to the voice of their own experience and to what can be learned from others. Unless the person in a leadership position is reflective enough to discover and respond to a guiding vision, he or she will be constantly overcome by circumstances'.*

During his inaugural address, in Washington, D.C., on 20th January 1993, President Clinton, speaking about the challenges facing the world stated 'though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas' (Kavanagh, 1993, p.v). It is evident, therefore, that if the leader is to make a difference, his/her greatest strength will be the power of his/her ideas evolving from a reflective mind.

## Leaders as Agents of Change

In recent years, change has become part and parcel of school life and indeed of all aspects of life. Principals are regarded as being key agents in the introduction and management of change. Fullan (1982) views the principal 'as leader in a culture of change' (p.2). He goes on to state 'Everything must change at one time or another or else a static society will evolve' (p.3). Likewise, the OECD (2007) Report refers to principals as leaders of change when it states that

*'an important aspect of leadership is the management of change. Principals have been and will continue to be key figures in managing this change at school level.' (p.21).*

The NCCA (2009) in its discussion paper *Leading and Supporting Change* in Schools reiterates the fact that leadership is critical to achieving change

*'leadership in making meaning out of and developing ideas for change, in building effective personal and institutional relationships for change, in encouraging innovative and creative thinking and action, in establishing effective services for change, in motivating the next person or network to be involved in change, is critical to achieving deep and lasting change.' (p.14).*

In an era of unprecedented change, many school leaders find the challenge of change daunting and may well resonate with the poet, Caitlin Maude, when she says 'Ach, a Dhia táim tuirseach' as she contemplates 'an teach eile seo...!' However, the converse side of this is that it is indeed a great privilege to lead the Catholic school at a time of huge change and upheaval in our world and in people's lives. Principals of Catholic schools can be powerful symbols of hope despite the many negatives that surround us.

## Management of Change

One of the essential elements, therefore, of school leadership is the effective management of change, which is a journey not an event. Change, if not well managed, can induce shifts in the ethos and culture often referred to as the characteristic spirit of a school. Every school generates its own unique culture, while Catholic schools aim to generate and sustain a culture which is expressive of, and gives voice to 'the characteristic spirit of the Catholic school and the school's Charter for education' (Mullally, 2010, p.18). For the principal of the Catholic school, leadership involves managing desired change, or facilitating imposed change, in such a way as to preserve the specifically Catholic nature of the school's ethos and culture. In recent years, the increasingly legislated context of educational provision has altered the landscape in which principals of Catholic schools in particular must undertake their responsibilities.

School development planning helps the school leadership to manage change in an effective way by enabling it to control the pace of change and in doing so to respond appropriately to new challenges. This ensures that the leadership views change as a process which can motivate staff and generate enthusiasm and excitement about the change. Another benefit of school development planning is that it builds up and strengthens team work, thus breaking down teacher isolation, increasing teacher confidence and in turn bringing about a commitment to improvement and good practice. Well managed, the process of change can transform the culture of a school by promoting a shared vision and setting future direction. Very often such a process can generate a huge surge of energy and an unleashing of the creative potential of the group, empowering the members through collaborative thinking, planning and sharing of ideas. School culture is a powerful resource for promoting and supporting change and development planning. In the Catholic school, understanding the values and beliefs that underlie the culture is fundamental to the process of change.

## School Culture

Moorehead and Griffins (2011) in their work *Organizational Behaviour* define culture as

*'A belief system shared by an organisation's members. Strong, widely-shared core values. The way we do things around here. The collective programming of the mind. Collective understanding. A set of shared, enduring beliefs communicated through a variety of symbolic media, creating meaning in people's work lives' (p.499).*

It is widely accepted that school leadership is one of the most important factors in determining the nature and quality of school culture. In the Catholic school, the leader, who is the custodian of the culture, has a duty to develop and shape that culture in a direction which supports the characteristic spirit of the school and gives meaning to all change.

We live in a world where the culture is rapidly evolving and shaping our thinking, not least because of the impact of technology. How we engage with technology and adapt to the change it has brought to school life depends on how we manage the change that technology has brought to teaching and learning. It is incumbent on all school leaders to embrace the change that results from the impact of technology and to manage it in a way that enhances, rather than dehumanises people. Brendan Kennelly (2002), in the *Judas Book*, warns of the influence of our modern culture on our lives and the erosion of confidence in the meaning of life resulting from this.

*'In the society we have created, it is very difficult to give your full, sustained attention to anything or anybody for long, we are compelled to half-do a lot of things, to half-live our lives, half-dream our dreams, half-love our loves. We have been made into half-people ... I believe our tragedy is the viability of our half-heartedness, our insured, mortgaged, welfare voyage of non-discovery, the committed, corrosive involvement with forces, created by ourselves, that ensure our lives will be half-lived. There's a sad refusal here. A rejection of the unique, fragile gift' (p.preface).*

The challenge of leadership is to ensure that both students and teachers creatively engage with technology as co-creators with a gracious God. In the Catholic, faith-based school, faith is a lens or perspective on reality and we must never allow technology to become the lens through which we view reality, separating us

from the Source of meaning. The leader must ensure that this does not happen because if we lose the sense of God, the sense of mystery and wonder, the sense of gratitude, as Kavanagh (1984) suggests in his poem *Advent*, 'we have tested and tasted too much, lover – through a chink too wide there comes no wonder' (pp.124-25). How we perceive life, and the lens through which we view life, are influenced by our faith or the lack of it.

### Impact of Education Legislation on School Leadership

The education landscape has undergone a sustained period of change over the last fifteen years with the advent of education legislation in particular. The passing of the Education Act (1998) was a landmark in Irish education, providing for the first time a necessary legislative basis for policy development and an opportunity to analyse and review many basic assumptions and traditional practices which had hitherto remained unquestioned. Up to this time, the only legislation governing Irish education was the Vocational Education Acts 1930 – 1970, governing the vocational sector only. For the first time in the history of the state, the Education Act (1998) provides a statutory framework for the Irish education system at first and second levels. It sets out the broad objectives and principles underpinning the education system. Schools have a number of duties under the Education Act (1998), some of which are summarised as follows:

- They must promote equality of opportunity for all students.
- They are required to use their available resources to ensure that the needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for.
- They must ensure that the Admissions Policy respects the principle of equality.
- They must prepare a School Plan, which must state the objectives of the school.
- The school must also set out the measures it will take to achieve these objectives.

Adherence to this Act presents a huge challenge for school leaders who have neither training nor understanding of the law and are struggling to comply with its terms and conditions. Coupled with that, the Act presents them with the twin challenges of adhering to the legislation and at the same time, giving voice to the core values and ethos of the Catholic school.

What followed on from the Education Act (1998) was a raft of education legislation, which placed further responsibilities on principals and significantly increased their workload. The White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) had noted that 'the democratic character of this society requires education to embrace the diverse traditions, beliefs and values of its people' (p.5). It placed particular emphasis on human rights, tolerance, mutual understanding, cultural identity and ethnic diversity, placing significant responsibilities on the leadership of the Catholic school.

The Irish Constitution also contains a number of provisions that are relevant to education, and school leadership must ensure that these provisions are adhered to, with particular reference to education and the family as outlined in Article 42 of the Constitution.

This is not to suggest, however, that education legislation is a negative thing or that it is detrimental to the leadership of the Catholic school. In many instances, it may well be that the legislation compels school leaders to face up to their obligations as leaders of the Catholic school and in a sense compels them to act in a more Christian manner. Saying this however, in no way underestimates the burden that legislation has placed on school leaders, who are expected to adhere to it, without the necessary training or supports.

### Conclusion

It is evident that leading and managing the Catholic school, in an era of change, is challenging but critical because change that is unmanaged is like being in a leaky boat, in unchartered waters, with a mutinous crew! The ongoing impact of change on school leadership is significant in terms of responsibility and accountability and presents a challenge to the leader, particularly in the context of the Catholic school, with a history of trust, care and commitment.

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NOEL J. COLLINS

# Teaching RE Today: The Contemporary Challenges Facing the Religious Educator



Noel J. Collins holds a Masters of Religious Education from Mater Dei Institute of Education, having completed a degree in Religious Education and Music in 2005. Noel has worked in Oatlands College CBS as a Religion and Music teacher since 2005 and has developed Religious Education as an exam subject at both Junior and Leaving Certificate level in addition to introducing music as an exam subject with the support of school management.

Noel has a keen interest in the relationship between faith and music and regularly plays the organ at religious services. He enjoys playing the piano and violin in his spare time.

## Introduction: The Relevance of Religious Education

Education at present, is facing unprecedented challenges; Religious Education is no exception. It would appear that in the current economic climate every subject at both Primary and Secondary level is being forensically examined in terms of its relevance and cost effectiveness. This process of examination is currently taking place in the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the Junior Certificate exam, which is scheduled to be overhauled in the coming two years. With a greater emphasis on project work, it is hoped the revised Junior Certificate will herald a new era of student based learning and mark a departure from rote learning. It is in this new environment of examination and justification that the following question must be asked: Is Religious Education relevant or can we, as a heavily indebted nation, afford Religious Education, given the scale of our economic challenges?

Religious Education is at the heart of the Catholic School. Moreover, it is not a subject of luxury or indulgence, but rather, a subject of necessity and increasing relevance. A common question that students ask at Secondary level is: Why do we need this subject? In many instances, it is right and only natural for students to question the validity and relevance of the subjects in which they are investing time, money and effort. More specifically, it is important for all teachers, especially the Religious Educator to reflect on this question of relevance. Why do students need to study Religious Education? For the vast majority of school leavers, solving quadratic equations and drawing Ordnance Survey maps are not considered relevant outside Secondary School. For many students, such activities as solving equations and drawing maps have been made redundant with the invention of the Calculator and 'Sat-Nav', unless they are entering a profession or field of study that requires them to use Maths or Geography. In this instance, the perception among many students is that computers and technology have diminished the relevance of certain subjects being taught at Secondary level.

Conversely, Religious Education is one of the few subjects that could be considered to have increased in relevance and importance for many teachers and students alike. Regardless of what college, job or unemployment line a school leaver goes to they are almost guaranteed to encounter a person belonging to a different major world religion. Irish schools, third-level colleges, work places and social welfare offices are now multi-cultural environments. Catholic schools are, increasingly, enrolling students from major world religions such as Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in

Ireland and the world today. It is inevitable, then, that many Catholic schools will have a rapidly growing number of Muslim students over the coming years. Moreover, it is this new visible presence of students from other faiths that has increased the relevance and importance of Religious Education in the eyes of many students and teachers working in the Catholic school. However, Religious Education faces its own unique set of challenges. It is my intention to outline three key challenges facing the Religious Educator in secondary schools in Ireland today. One of the major challenges facing Religious Education concerns how it should be taught.

## Religious Education or Catechesis?

The introduction of the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus (JCRES) in 2000 was and remains controversial in many Secondary schools. At the time of its introduction, two dominant opinions prevailed. On the one hand, there were those who felt threatened by the very notion of examining Religion as a subject because it was seen that this would leave little or no room for faith formation which is a central feature of Religious Education. On the other hand, there were teachers who welcomed the JCRES because it was seen as an earnest attempt to raise the profile of Religion in schools across the country by providing a solid framework of topics to be covered throughout the three years. Unfortunately, many teachers today continue to see teaching Religion as a choice between Religious Education and Catechesis.

Religious Education, in this context, refers to a traditional knowledge based approach to teaching and learning. Typically, teachers who adopt this approach will steer clear of the oratory or prayer room and will avoid like the plague encouraging students to pray. The 'touchy-feely' part of Religion is usually left to the school Chaplain. This approach to the subject will often view the Religion course as a series of facts that students are required to learn for their JCRE exam in June.

Catechesis, on the other hand, concentrates primarily on the faith formation of students. The Catechetical approach focuses on giving students an experience of Religion. This approach will employ experiential teaching strategies including a Shared Christian Praxis in addition to ensuring that prayer is a regular feature of the RE classroom. It is unfortunate, that many teachers view Religious Education as a choice between these two approaches. Ideally, as one becomes familiar with the JCRES the Religious Education and the Catechetical approach will work in harmony with one another. To neglect one approach in favour of the other will

only diminish the students' experience of the subject. Covering all the required topics for the JCRE exam in addition to providing quality time for faith formation continues to be a key challenge for the Religious Educator. But, how can a Religion teacher adopt the Catechetical approach in a multi-faith context?

### The Challenge of Faith formation in a Multi-faith Setting

The influx of students from other faiths and the increase in the number of students who subscribe to a worldview such as atheism and agnosticism, present a real challenge for Religious Educators in Irish schools, especially for those who incorporate an element of faith formation. Faith formation in this new multi-faith context can be like trying to navigate through a minefield, often with explosive consequences if the teacher in question is not mindful of their footing. But how can Catholic schools in particular, continue to focus on faith formation in a multi-faith context? The religious educator needs to be cognisant of the religious affiliation of the students before any faith formation exercises are carried out. Furthermore, another prerequisite is a basic knowledge and understanding of the points of contact and the differences between the major faiths. For example, provided sufficient notice is given to students to allow time for any conscientious objectors, a guided meditation on the prophet Abraham could be devised, with emphasis on his faithfulness to God and his willingness to follow God's word. Abraham provides us with a clear point of contact between the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam); all three religions trace their ancestry back to Abraham. We are children of Abraham and all faith formation exercises need to be mindful of the common bond and the rich heritage that Jews, Christians and Muslims share. Guided meditation or prayer in this multi-faith setting is an exercise in imagination that incorporates a strong element of faith. However, the name Abraham could be easily replaced with Muhammad, Jesus or Buddha etc.

Apart from class meditation, there is also the possibility of organising inter-faith Prayer services, where the sacred texts from all the represented faiths would be equally represented in addition to formulating prayers of petition from each faith. It can often prove very effective to incorporate different languages in such prayer services and allow time for an English translation to be provided. Inter-faith meditation and contemplation, and inter-faith prayer services are important tools available to all Religious Educators as a means of addressing the growing challenge of developing faith in a multi-faith context.

### The Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus

The Leaving Certificate Religious Education (LCRE) programme, introduced in 2003 was another positive development in firmly cementing Religious Education as a serious academic subject in the mindset of many teachers and students. However, the academic content of the LCRE continues to present a challenge for students and teachers. Many would argue that parts of the course urgently need to be simplified, both in terms of language and of the overly broad nature of some of the sections that must be covered. Section B of the course, for example, focuses on Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expressions. This section would benefit greatly from revision in terms of reducing the topic load on students.

This year 2012 will be my fifth year teaching the LCRES and for the vast majority of the students I have taught, Section A: The Search for Meaning has been the most enjoyable part of the course. More specifically, many of my students have really enjoyed learning about Philosophy and the ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Initially, I had expected that the philosophy component would be the most challenging part of the LCRES, but I soon discovered the questioning mind of young adults married with philosophy was a match made in heaven. Moreover, it is this innate ability of students to question and search for meaning that is a source of encouragement and hope when it comes to entering the trenches of the Religious Education classroom. I am conscious that for many Religious Educators the term trenches is only a euphemism for the daily struggle that can take place between teacher and student. In circumstances where the RE class is a battle-ground and a struggle to maintain discipline, the role of senior school management in providing support both in terms of discipline and in maintaining morale can be invaluable. Religious Education needs to be respected at the highest level in Catholic Schools. If there is no respect for RE amongst the school staff, then it is very difficult for students to respect the subject. This, in turn makes the job of the Religious Educator unnecessarily difficult.

## Conclusion

Overall, the challenges facing the Religious Educator in Secondary schools in Ireland are multi-faceted and complex in nature. However, there are many reasons to be hopeful in these uncertain economic times. For instance, although there is an absence of a full-time Chaplain in many Voluntary Secondary schools as a result of the refusal by the Department of Education and Skills to fund such position in these schools, many schools have overcome this challenge by taking the initiative to provide Chaplaincy services using the Special Duties framework. Alternatively, some schools have chosen to fundraise to employ a full or part-time Chaplain, as their role is seen as invaluable in the context of the Catholic school. The leadership and vision of these schools are to be commended. For if we are serious about protecting the ethos of the Catholic school then practical measures such as employing a Chaplain, or providing extra support by using the Special Duties post structure, is a necessity that will provide essential support to the Religious Educator and the students.

The most valuable resource available to all teachers is the students themselves. In the Religious Education classroom, students from other faiths and other Christian denominations are not to be feared, but rather, embraced as invaluable teaching resources. Most students relish the opportunity to become actively involved in lessons; students from other faiths are no different. For example, I could teach 'Prayer in Islam' from the textbook alone or I could invite a Muslim student (with his prior consent of course) to demonstrate the prayer movements in Islam. Which is better? Reading religion or living religion?

By way of conclusion, there are of course many other challenges facing the Religious Educator besides those I have outlined above. However, as we have already seen, the challenges I have identified above have also provided new opportunities in terms of faith formation and Religion teaching at both junior and senior cycle. It gives me great hope that students continue to express a surreptitious interest in Religion by asking questions such as 'how do you know God exists?'. Is this desire to know more about God not the beginning of faith? This fragile faith is entrusted to us to nourish, and we hope that in doing so, our own faith may in turn be nourished.

CAITRÍONA M. LYNCH

# A Mother's Reflections on Religious Education in Irish Catholic Schools 1986-2012

*The following are the personal views and experiences of a 'lay' mother. In no way does it set out or claim to be an academic thesis or critique of the RE curriculum, which I have not studied in detail.*

*My own knowledge of the curriculum comes from the text books which my children have been using and from the personal comments they have made to me over the years regarding what takes place in their RE classes.*

As a mother of 7 children currently aged 29 to 14, I have been involved in the Archdiocese of Dublin Catholic Schools education system from 1986 to date. My youngest child is currently doing his Junior Certificate, aged 14. My eldest child made her First Holy Communion in 1989 at 6 years of age. At that stage children made their Holy Communion in First Class. My youngest made his Holy Communion in May 2005 aged 7 when he was in Second Class. During the intervening 16 years the standard of Religious Education in primary schools and especially the preparation given for reception of the Sacraments has, in my opinion, significantly declined. This is to the detriment of the passing on of the faith to the next generation.

As a person who is involved in adult education I am well aware of the necessity for change, availing of new methods of teaching, and dealing with the radically changing environment in which our children are being reared. However it would seem to me that in an effort to change what is old and bring in what is new the proverbial baby has been thrown out with the bath water. The RE material covers the basic fact that God exists, He loves us, He created us and He invites us into relationship with him. However it usually avoids truths such as the fact that we are fallen creatures, we have a tendency to stray from God and we need to keep renewing that relationship. In other words, sin, our utter need for a Saviour and redemption are largely ignored.

In chatting to some junior school teachers over the years, the point has often been made to me that due to the lack of practice of the faith among many young parents there is no point in introducing children to the whole concept of personal relationship with God, fallen nature, disobedience and above all sin, as none of these facts will be endorsed or upheld by the parents.

When our eldest child was making her Holy Communion in 1989 we found ourselves in the situation of just having to fill in a few little gaps that we perceived. One small one I remember clearly was in her RE book in preparation for Confession, there was an example given of a little girl who had been asked to go out and get milk for the family's tea. She did not want to do it and continued to sit on the couch. However as she thought about it she realised that if she didn't go for the milk there would be no milk for the tea and everybody would be sad and it would be difficult and that the loving thing to do would be to go and get the milk so that everybody could have milk with their tea. While these sentiments in and off themselves are very laudable, the pertinent point was missed completely i.e. the fact that she was being disobedient to her mother if she did not do what her mother asked her to do. Whilst to many this may seem like nit-picking we felt it

was important. The ten commandments had not been taught to her at that point (which I think was a pity) and so it was all the more important to highlight the need for the little girl to honour and obey her mother.

There is a school of thought that says children are too young to understand this whole concept of sin, disobedience, repentance. However it is accepted that in making their Holy Communion our children have reached the use of reason. Therefore they are capable of reasoning things out and having a knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

By the time our youngest made first Confession and Communion in 2005, things had, in my opinion, regressed. Let me explain. Every child, by aged 7, has been taught that certain behaviours are unacceptable. He has also been taught that he needs to apologise to his siblings/friends if he does something that is socially unacceptable e.g. taking toys, slapping, hitting, biting, pulling hair etc. It was our experience whilst bringing our youngest child for the Sacrament of Holy Communion and Repentance that these concepts had been well taught in the context of the need to care for one another. However, something more important and central was missing. The child's relationship with God had been only weakly referred to or ignored altogether. Whilst in no way wishing to sound like a fanatical puritan encouraging indoctrination of our children with the horrors of hell and damnation, it is clear to us that at no point during their preparation for Confession were the children being taught that an offence against others is also an offence against God. Whilst they were encouraged to "live like Jesus" and "not sin again" (this being the only mention of sin in the whole year as far as I could see) the idea of offending God and asking His mercy and forgiveness and the grace of the Sacrament was largely ignored.

Another aspect which seems to have received little emphasis in the Junior school RE curriculum is the use of the Scriptures. There are of course mentions of incidents from the life of Jesus, e.g. Jairus' daughter, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, etc., but it would seem that these stories were never put into the context of the Scriptures, of the Gospel being the life story of Jesus etc. This was borne out to me when in 2006 I was subbing in a Dublin Secondary school and found myself working with a class of approximately 28 First Years. These were girls who had made their Confirmation the previous February and March in 6th Class in their Junior Schools. The majority of girls in the class did not know what the word Gospel meant, did not know the names of the Four Evangelists and whilst recognising some of the stories that come from the Scriptures they had no idea that that was where they came from. For the majority of the class it would seem

that their understanding of God was confined to Him being a benevolent being who loved them no matter what. The whole idea of a relationship, of growing in understanding of that relationship or having any obligation to God, of needing to enter into that relationship or taking responsibility for anything that might come against that relationship was alien to them. Perhaps however this is not to be wondered at, considering that in the same class the majority did not attend Mass or the Sacraments on a regular basis. This of course is crucial to the problem. It is very difficult to nurture and grow something in a vacuum.

Our education system operates on the understanding that parents are the primary educators of their children, and that education takes place in the hope and understanding that it is a joint effort between parents and teachers. Sadly, however, given the fact that so many parents nowadays are not practicing their faith on a regular basis, it would be true to say that nowadays the vast majority of religious education for young children is coming solely from the school. It therefore becomes crucial that the children are receiving a religious education from a zealous practicing enthusiastic RE teacher. To call in an old phrase 'Religion is caught, not taught'. So it is therefore absolutely imperative that the teachers themselves must believe and be faithfully practicing their Catholic faith. You cannot teach what you do not know. To quote Pope John Paul I "God protect us from theologians who talk about God but do not talk to God".

As part of the Primary School SPHE programme schools are expected by 6th class to have covered various topics, including contraception. My experience of these sessions is that they tend to be just a whole load of information, given without any Catholic guidance or judgement. A few years ago, whilst chatting with the class teacher during a parent teacher meeting, I suggested that maybe she might like to dip into *Humanae Vitae* and share a few thoughts on it as regards the whole area of contraception etc. that would be discussed in the class. She informed me she would not be doing that as she did not agree with the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. This was not my first experience of talking to RE teachers who themselves seemed to be out of step with church teaching. Probably one of the more interesting conversations I had was with an RE teacher who at the time was living with a married man whilst teaching RE to Transition year students.

Quite rightly in my opinion, in the recent past an issue has been made by the Education Minister Mr. Ruairi Quinn, about unqualified teachers being used in schools. It would seem to me that one of the basic requirements of religious education teachers is that they have a personal faith that they are practicing. An academic knowledge of the subject alone is not enough.

My children's secondary education began in 1995 and continues to date with my youngest son doing his Junior Cert this year. To my intense joy and delight they get a Bible in 1st year and begin to read it. However my daughter, who was barely 13 at that stage began coming home with many questions pertaining to her teacher's personal interpretation of the Scriptures. Whilst some of these pertained to rather minor issues and did not necessitate any real intervention, there were also some major issues, with question marks being put over the real presence, exaggerations on miracles, i.e. Jesus didn't really feed 5000, that was just a numerical symbol for something else.

During my 17 years' experience of secondary school Religious Education I have met a couple of truly excellent principals, who were very keen to pass on the Catholic faith in a vibrant and living way. I have also met some very dedicated and faithful Catholic teachers. However, sad to say, these are in the minority.

One of my daughters is a Montessori teacher and as part of her training she was sent on placement to a Montessori school which is attached to a Catholic School. At the time we were in the Lenten season and as the Easter season was approaching, she brought in her own Children's Bible and started to talk to the children about the events that would be happening over coming weeks. The head of the Montessori school drew her aside after the first day and told her not to mention anything about the Crucifixion and the fact that Jesus had died. She could certainly talk about the Resurrection. However talk about death and the Crucifixion was too frightening for the children and she needed to leave that out. My daughter was baffled as to how she was to give a full understanding of the significance of the Resurrection if she wasn't allowed talk about the death of Christ. Whereas I am in complete agreement that it would be wrong to horrify children with dreadful stories of torture and inhumane stories of suffering and death, I do believe that the basic facts of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ can be couched in such terms as are acceptable to young children, as has been done for hundreds and hundreds of years. The basis for this kind of thinking seems to be found in the view that the complexities of the Catholic faith are such that they cannot be understood by young children. At one stage a Junior Infants teacher told me it would be far too difficult to try to introduce the concept of angels and especially Holy Guardian Angels to the children in Junior Infants, the whole notion of invisible beings flying around the place and being present but not being able to be seen in our world was far too complicated and difficult and frightening. However it would seem the self-same children have no difficulty accepting Santa flying through the air in his sleigh and popping down

chimneys at Christmas time! Without wishing to seem cynical, I wonder why one is so difficult and scary and the other totally acceptable? – And although I may be accused of looking at the past through rose coloured glasses, I do have very fond memories of myself as a young child feeling very special at the thoughts that God would give me a special Guardian Angel of my own to mind me. Indeed it was common in those days to see around the walls of the classroom pictures of Guardian Angels caring for young children.

As a Family Management and Parenting Consultant I am well aware that we grossly underestimate our children's ability to cognitively understand and appreciate basic skills and truths. Frequently parents have returned to me declaring how amazed they are, at the change in their children's behaviour after they have sat down with them and explained the rights and wrongs, the dos and don'ts of a situation. I would respectfully suggest that as regards the religious education of our children we are doing the same. We are setting the bar far too low for our children. In an overzealous desire not to burden our children with complicated matters of doctrine as we perceive them, we have effectively ended up teaching them very little. In my experience it is no more difficult for a 7 year old to grasp the fact that Jesus is fully and truly present in the Eucharistic, in the bread and in the wine, body, blood, soul and divinity, than it is for them to be told that this is Holy Bread and Jesus is present in a special way. Of course the mystery of the Eucharist is one of the deepest and most profound mysteries of our faith and for Catholics it is the source and summit of our faith. However we do not need to burden our 7 year olds with all the theology but merely inform them of the truth and invite them to believe it.

As previously attested to, the lack of practice on the part of parents of young children is indeed a major stumbling block to the passing on of the faith. There is a perceived wisdom that there is no point in teaching religious truths to children if they are simply going to be ignored or worse, discredited by their parents when they go home. While this is indeed quite a problem, it is not a reason, in my opinion, for us to be deterred from speaking the whole truth as regards the Catholic faith. Perhaps indeed we may take an example from Christ himself in the Gospel of St. John Chapter 6, verses 60-70 where He is teaching on the very issue of eating His body and drinking His blood. We see many of his disciples no longer walked with Him because of their inability to accept this teaching. However, the Lord does not water down or change His teaching in any way. As the Lord Himself says, the truth will set us free.

Lack of accurate teaching and indeed erroneous teaching is not confined to schools. Within the last 7 years one of my daughters was attending a 5th year school retreat. In the course of the retreat, facilitated by a reputable Catholic institute, the inevitable question of relationships and the Church's teaching on pre-marital sex etc. came up in questions. The schoolgirls were informed by those conducting the retreat that as long as they were in a long-term committed relationship it was permissible to be having a sexual relationship. There was no mention of marriage or the necessity that the couple be married before having a full sexual relationship. My daughter came home from the retreat quite confused. Thankfully, having been made aware of the error, the school principal did her utmost to set it to rights.

Tús maith leath na hoibre. It is from the basis of a good education in simple things that we can build on and increase our knowledge of greater things, e.g. algebra, trigonometry and calculus in secondary school would be very difficult to understand without a knowledge of our basic 1,2,3's, addition, subtraction and multiplication. From the humblest beginnings of adding 1 and 1 to make 2 scientists are sending rockets to the moon. From a solid and basic belief that God loves me and cares for me, wants nothing but the best for me, desires to love me and have me love Him, and will guide me in all truth, comes an ability to struggle with and accept complicated moral questions which abound in our world today. It is virtually impossible to expect a young teenager to take on board and explore the teachings of Christ through the Catholic Church on such grave issues as the sacredness of human life, contraception and divorce if they do not understand the truths of who God is, why He made us and how He cares for us. The young people will then be able to come to grips too with issues no less important but less grave such as honesty in taxation, respect for authority, honesty in the workplace.

In Philippians 3 verse 8, St. Paul writes "I consider that nothing can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ". St Jerome said "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ". To truly know God we need to know what He says to us so that we can follow Him in all that we do. He also invites us to come to know Him in a personal way through Christ our Saviour. To neglect either of these aspects of faith is to leave it sterile or defective or both. In passing on the great gift of faith, we owe it to our children to comprehensively include both aspects in the school RE programmes.

# Development Education

It has become an increasingly popular feature of our secondary schools in recent years that small groups of senior students are being offered an opportunity to travel to a developing country to experience for themselves what it is like to live in one of these areas. The purpose of these visits is to raise awareness of global poverty and inequality. They are usually facilitated through religious orders working in these areas, through voluntary organisations or NGO's or through Irish Aid's WorldWise programme. Students and teachers usually spend 2-3 weeks in their chosen area, working with and learning from their hosts.

They generally get an opportunity to visit local families to see how they live and in return do whatever they can do help support their host communities. In some instances, there are return visits to Ireland by either students or adults from the host country.

Discussion is ongoing as to the value of these visits so we asked students who took part in these immersion programmes for their comments on their visits and here we publish some of their responses.

## Visit to Ghana by students from Seamount College, Kinvara, Co. Galway

EILEEN FITZGERALD (Teacher)

*This special project began in our school 5 years ago, when two of our teachers, Margo Mhic Domhnaill and Geraldine Connors, travelled to Ghana and established a link with Notre Dame Secondary School in Sunyani. In 2009, Seamount College, welcomed Augustine Akwowuki and Naomi Gardor Tanawa, two teachers from Notre Dame Senior High School, who travelled to Kinvara and taught at Seamount for two weeks. The next phase of the project was a visit by five fifth-year and transition year students and two teachers who travelled on an immersion visit to Ghana in June 2011 for two weeks. The girls attended school in their link school Notre Dame Girls Senior High School, Sunyani. The students also had the opportunity to visit projects supported by Irish Aid. This wonderful opportunity has grown from our Development Education programme, which is grant-aided by WorldWise.*

*The immersion visit to a Catholic school had a huge impact on our students. They found their Ghanaian peers very vocal and open about their own religious beliefs. They saw a very strong faith which was evident in all aspects of the lives of the Ghanaian girls. The Seamount College students all say that they have learned to be more thankful to God for all the blessings they enjoy. They enjoyed and envied the strength of faith in their Ghanaian peers and feel regretful that such strength of faith seems to be absent in Ireland because (according to them), religion/faith is not part of their daily lives, but something compartmentalised in a 30-40 minute Mass on Sunday.*

LUCY O'DONOGHUE

*The girls in my class in Sunyani were very passionate about their faith. They have such a close connection with God and it is clear their faith plays a huge role in their life. I couldn't believe the difference between their approach to Religion and ours. In Ghana it is seen as 'cool' to have a strong faith and to be outspoken about it, with 'I love Jesus' stickers displayed on cars and school books. After the trip I made more of an effort to attend Mass and to thank God for all I have. The girls were always expressing their thanks to God for everything, whereas I, at home, rarely thanked God for anything. But after seeing how much the girls praised God, even though some had much less to be thankful for than I had, I tried to be more thankful. Yes, I would say my faith has become stronger. I am more grateful to God and I practice my religion much more regularly.*

#### MARIA O'MEARA

*The phrases Loretta, my penpal from Ghana, used in her letters showed me how passionate she was about her religious beliefs. Phrases that would be uncommon for people of the same age to write so passionately about God here. In this part of the world, it would be regarded as 'uncool' for one to express one's faith so defiantly. The girls' strong approach to their faith affected me in the sense that I realised I had to become more thankful to God for all he gives us. They still take time each day to be thankful to God. The girls of Notre Dame taught me that I must not take Our Lord for granted and for this reason I can say that this immersion visit strengthened my faith.*

#### JENNY KINANE

*It is evident that religion plays an important role in the lives of Ghanaian teenage girls. One of the first questions I was asked was if I was a Christian. I wasn't expecting them to be so interested in this subject, but it ended up being a popular topic of conversation during the week. I was even asked to say a prayer in Irish. It was refreshing to be around them, as they were so sure of their beliefs and it was such a source of comfort and happiness for them. In Ireland, it is so rare to come across a teenager with strong faith like this. In Ghana, religion is celebrated. Singing and dancing and praising God with a long, heartfelt sermon is the highlight of the week and everyone leaves the church feeling spiritual and liberated. Being around the girls in Ghana did make me think more about my faith. In my opinion, the confidence they have in their beliefs is to be envied. I don't pray any more than I did before. However, I did thank God for the trip of a lifetime when I returned to Ireland.*

#### CLAIRE MC HUGH

*Religion seems to me to be a very important aspect of Ghanaian culture. "God bless you", was often said to us as greetings and farewells. It was nice to see such a vibrant religious culture, in comparison to Ireland. In the classroom, it was clear that girls were extremely into their faith. The girls were also fascinated that the common greeting in Irish was also "Dia dhuit". They really liked this idea of constantly being greeted with a blessing, they told me. At Mass, sermons were hours long showing the deep love they have by putting energy and effort into their sermons. I now have a lot more respect for people who put time and effort into their faith, seeing how*

*happy it made the Ghanaians and if I lived in Ghana, I would undoubtedly have stronger faith, mainly because it is more enjoyable to be immersed in the church there. The singing, dancing and passionate prayers all help to keep their faith alive. It is much harder to be submerged in faith here, than it was in Ghana.*

#### Visit to Kasama, Zambia - Coláiste Íosagáin, Baile an Bhóthair

Through the Edmund Rice Immersion Programme, Coláiste Íosagáin made their link with Br. Dominique Sykes and the schools and adult training centre in Kasama in Northern Zambia. Since an important focus of development in this area is the education of women and girls, it was an appropriate choice for the only girls' school in the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. Three teachers visited Kasama in 2007, followed by student visits in 2008 and 2010. A group of past pupils is planning a visit during summer 2012.

#### AOIFE NÍ DHONNABHÁIN

*Bhí an-éifeacht ag an turas go Zambia orm mar dhuine. Déanaim machnamh gach lá ar an am a chaith mé i Kasama, agus ar na daoine ar bhuail mé leo ann, go háirithe ar an mBráthair Dominique. Is fear spreagúil, fuinniúil, tuisceanach é, agus d'fhoghlaim mé an-chuid uaidh. Mhúin sé dom nach mise a chúisigh fadhb an trú domhain, ach go bhféadfainn páirt a ghlacadh i réiteach na faidhbe sin. Tar éis dom filleadh ó Zambia, is dóigh liom go bhfuil níos mó tuisceana agam ar bhunluachanna na beatha. Ní raibh mé riamh chomh sona is a bhí mé nuair a bhí mé i Kasama. Spreag an turas cairdeas agus gaol buan eadrainn mar ghrúpa. Chabhraigh sé liom a bheith níos tuisceanaí agus níos aibí mar dhuine.*

*Nuair a bhíomar ann, chaitheamar am chuile lá i dtír scoil éagsúla. Ba é Chiléise Chepela, scoil do pháistí a bhí faoi mhíbhuntáiste nó faoi mhíchumas, an scoil ba mhó a chuaigh i bhfeidhm orm. In ainneoin go raibh formhór na bpáistí bodhar, dall nó faoi mhíchumas fisiciúil eile, bhí spiorad agus cairdeas dochreidte le braith san áit. Roinneadar leapacha, d'imríodar lena chéile sa tráthnóna, agus chabhraigh siad lena chéile le béilí agus le hobair scoile. Léirigh an scoil seo dúinn na deiseanna atá againn i dtír mar Éire. Tá breis is bliain go leith imithe ó d'fhilliamar agus san am sin, táim tar éis tuiscint níos fear a fháil ar an saol mórthimpeall orm. Táim buíoch as na rudaí bunúsacha sa saol - an sonas, an chlann agus na cuimhní cinn atá agam ar an am a chaith mé i Zambia. Dá bhfaighinn an deis, d'fhillfinn amárach.*

*Is cuimhin liom an chéad mhaidin i ndiaidh dom filleadh ó Zambia, dhúisigh mé agus d'fhéach mé ar mo chuid éadaí agus ba dheacair dom a chreidiúint go raibh gá agam leis an oiread sin. Is cuimhin liom siúl go dtí an trá agus d'fhéach an domhan chomh hálainn agus chomh suaimhneach. Níor thuig mé ag an am é, ach tuigim anois go raibh an domhan á fheiscint agam trí shúile Zambia. Bhí na buairt bheaga sheafóideacha sin a bhíonn i gcúl ár n-aighe i gcónaí glanta agus d'aimsigh mé síocháin agus gliondar éigin nach raibh ar fáil dom roimh mo thuras. I Zambia thuig mé cad atá tábhachtach, rudaí simplí, cosúil le meanga gáire agus mianta don todhcháí, rudaí cosúil le do chuid ama a thabhairt do dhuine éigin. Tá daoine ann i gcónaí a chabhróidh liomsa ach chonaic mé san Aifric gur pribhléid é sin. Níl aon rud ag teastáil ó na páistí ansin ach go n-éistfear leo agus go dtabharfar aird orthu. Dírímid ar airgead a bhailiú do dhaoine bochta, ach tá rudaí níos luachmhaire is féidir linn a thabhairt agus mhúin an turas go Kasama é sin dom.*

*Chaitheamar a lán ama sna seomraí ranga ag obair leis na páistí, rud a thaitin go mór liom agus tá suim agam anois dul leis an mbunmhúinteoireacht. Dá mbeadh seans agam turas mar seo a dhéanamh arís agus páistí mar seo a mhúineadh, léimfinn ar an eitleán mar is dóigh liom go bhfuil fíorbhrí an tsaoil le haimsiú iontu. Tá macántacht ag baint leo a chuaigh i bhfeidhm go mór orm agus tá siad fíorbhuíoch as an mbeagán atá acu.*

*Ag smaoineamh siar anois ar an am ar chaith mé le mo chomhscoláirí i Kasama, Zambia, tá sé deacair an éifeacht a bhí aige orm a chur i bhfocail ach is cinnte gur athraigh an turas mé. An nóiméad a shroicheadar Kasama ba léir dúinn go raibh an saol ansin go iomlán difriúil ó Éirinn. Bhí mé neirbhíseach agus scanraithe, gan amhras ach nuair a bhuaileamar leis na páistí bhí said chomh bríomhar agus fáilteach gur mhothaigh mé ar mo shuaimhneas. Léirigh siad an fháilte seo gach lá agus ghlac siad go hiomlán linn ina saoil laethúil. Chaitheamar ár gcuid ama i trí scoil éagsúla ansin agus mhothaigh mé go hiomlán éagsúil agus mé ag fágáil gach ceann acu, go háirithe ar an lá deireanach. Agus muid ag imeacht ó Naíonra St. Martin de Porres agus scoil Chifwani, bhí fíor-bhrón orm agus smaoinim ar na páistí sin go h-an-mhinic, ach bhí a fhios agam go raibh múinteoirí acu a thabharfadh tacaíocht dóibh, agus dar ndóigh go mbeadh an Bráthair Dominique acu. Níor mhothaigh mé mar an gcéanna ag imeacht don uair dheireanach ó Chilese Chepela. Bhí páistí agus déagóirí ansin nach raibh in ann labhairt, nó a bhí bodhar nó a raibh géaga in easnamh orthu, gach saghas rud, agus thug siad an deis domsa, dalta scoile ó Bhaile Átha Cliath, éisteacht leo agus aithne a chur orthu. Ansin nuair a dúramar leo nach mbeimis ag filleadh níor thuig siad agus bhí an-trua agam dóibh.*

*Tuigimid ar fad an easpa airgid atá sa Trú Domhan, ach fuair ár ngrúpa an deis a fheiceáil cé chomh hálainn, cé chomh lán de sprid, d'áthas agus de bhuanna nádúrtha atá na páistí seo agus a fheiceáil chomh maith cé chomh buíoch is atá siad as a bhfuil acu. Léiríonn siad grá don saol agus chonaic mé é seo gach uile maidin nuair a shiúil mé isteach i St. Martin de Porres, Chifwani agus Chilese Chepela.*

*Tá a fhios agam nach mbeidh tuiscint cheart agam riamh ar an saol atá acu thall i Zambia ach táim fíorbhuíoch as an seans radharc a fháil ar an saol ann agus gan amhras tá súil agam dul ar ais ansin uair éigin amach anseo.*

# Why I Love My School

*Boni Odoemee, from De La Salle College, Churchtown, gave this talk at a public meeting recently and was a great success with his audience. We asked him for permission to reproduce it here.*

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Boni Odoemene. I am a 5th year student at De La Salle College Churchtown. I am here to talk to you about my school and what I like about it.

Now when my principal gave me this task of giving a speech about my school, I went home and thought to myself, 'What do I like about my school?'

To do this I had to bring myself right back to when I was a 1st year... how excited I was coming to De La Salle. It was a great change for me, from being one of the big lads in 6th class, to just another one of 'them 1st years'. I felt like a needle in a haystack... like an ant in a jungle... where everyone else was bigger, stronger and definitely hairier than me. It made me nervous.

One thing I like about my school is how they attempt to get rid of that fear that comes with entering a new school. A week before the new school year begins, a rugby camp is organised for the 1st years. This had a positive effect on me because it gave me a chance to get to know some of the other new lads coming in. If rugby wasn't your thing you were able to play table tennis or computer games.

We also have this system called the 'mentor system' to help 1st year students to settle into the school. This is where eight 5th year students are chosen to become mentors. They are given a certain number of 1st years and from then on it's their responsibility to make them feel safe and accepted in school. They're almost like big brothers who help, assist and advise their group of 1st years. This doesn't mean they wouldn't do the same for others, but their own group is special.

Going back when I was writing this speech, looking for what I love about my school I just couldn't ignore my Transition Year. I enjoyed that year the most. 4th year is very different in my school compared to others. I remember talking to my friend Ross about Transition Year and what it's like in his school. He told me that he hated it... that it's boring... they do nothing... that he wished he skipped it. I was surprised. Ross then asked me about 4th year in my school and what we do. I told him about our swimming classes, our 1st aid training, our sailing adventures, our driving courses and our cooking and gardening classes. Transition year in my school is not like any other year. It is used to develop and help us express our hidden talents and interests. For example, in Life Skills we learned about 'body language'. This was to prepare us for interviews in the future, where your body posture and position is constantly being analysed by the interviewer.

'Like Daniel here, in the front, his arms are crossed. He's in a defensive position.'

For my work experience I had to choose three places of work. I enjoyed work experience because it gave me time away from the classroom, the books and some of the teachers. Thankfully! And it allowed me to get out there and face the world of work. One of my work choices had to involve helping my community. I chose to work at my local St. John of God's for the disabled. It was an emotional

experience for me because my sister has a disability. I love my sister; she's an incredible girl. Seeing people that needed help for almost everything that we take for granted, like reaching their top shelf for food, or going up the stairs, it's saddening; yet they're happy. They don't worry about their noisy neighbours or about the way people may look at them. One of my favourite service users 'Kenneth' was always able to put a smile on my face, by what he did or what he would say. My experience at St. John of God's taught me that we are all people, you can put whatever name on it 'disabled or not', we are all the same and we should really appreciate the presence of one another.

What I love most about my school must be its atmosphere. De La Salle is famous for this atmosphere of ours that is felt by all the students. It is quiet hard to explain because it's something we feel. There's this comfortable feeling, this sense of home.....

Being a 5th year student in De La Salle College, wearing their senior black jumper, makes me proud. I love my school. Most 16 year olds wouldn't say that now, would they? My Principal once told my class back in 1st year that 'You Lads have come in here as boys. I'm going to make sure that you leave as gentlemen'. What a challenge! I have two years left so I hope I'm getting there?

My mum always tells me 'work hard now, then enjoy the fruits of life in the future'.

So that's what I'll do, work hard. For my parents, my sister, my Principal, and my school.

I am proud to go to De La Salle. Ladies and gentlemen, this is why I love my school.

Thank you

RÓNÁN MULLEN

## Better Divest than Dilute – Why We should Protect Denominational Schools

Rónán Mullen is an Independent Senator representing National University of Ireland graduates and a board member of CEIST, a trust body for over 100 voluntary secondary schools.



If education is never far from being a controversial issue in Ireland, that's only because we all know that what happens in our schools is vital. The wellbeing of children and the shape and texture of society have always been, and will always be, deeply affected by what happens in the classroom. Why else would people be so exercised by whether and how religion is taught in schools? On the face of it, there seem to be more practical things to worry about. There is a crisis in education funding. All over the country, parents and teachers are protesting at the impact of increased pupil-teacher ratios. Small schools in particular are vulnerable. More teachers will find themselves surplus to quota and will have to be redeployed. At primary level, reduced teacher numbers means a larger and more awkward spread of year-groups in the one classroom. At secondary level, it means reduced subject choice. Throughout the system, children with special needs and their families will have a tougher time.

There is also the question of what should predominate in our education system. Should children be learning Chinese and Science in school, or Irish and History? Art or Business? I.T. or R.E.? Is there room for everything? These questions are all important. But in the same way that Ireland's Embassy to the Holy See remained big news at a time of major economic crisis and instability, the question of religion and ethos in our schools will remain central even while we try to fund the basic decencies in education and to balance all-round personal development with preparation for the business world. Because, for all the talk about Ireland modernising and secularising, we remain a people with a deep interest in religion. Despite our obsession with home ownership and other indicators of material security, not to mention the material whirl of the Celtic Tiger years, many Irish people remain sceptical about the long-term adequacy of material things.

A large percentage of the population still attends church regularly. An even larger percentage professes belief in God (although the depth of their feelings on the subject often only emerges under the influence of a pint or two). Perhaps the largest cohort of all is of those who, whatever they think of their own religious state, want their children to learn values of love and kindness, hard work and self-sacrifice, concern for others and a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

It may seem a remarkable thing that, despite the scandals, the Church is still seen as the agent and principal carrier of the values people want for their children. But it should not surprise. Many people in Ireland still know their local clergy and, in recent years certainly, most people's experience has been positive. The

message of the Second Vatican Council that religion is everybody's business (all are called to holiness) is gradually coming to be understood. And, also, most people are logical. They know that even if one priest commits a crime, and another priest or bishop fails to report it, those failings are more a reflection on those people themselves than on the Church they claim to represent or on the Christian message that they stand for.

The large constituency of people who want Christian values for their children will be crucial to the re-shaping of the Irish educational system. But their interests may be difficult to reconcile with the aspirations of certain other influential categories. A small but vocal group now proclaims an atheistic or agnostic perspective on existence. They want to construct the possibility of personal and moral formation of children without, as an agnostic friend of mine once put it, 'bringing them up in the love of God'. There are others who actively reject the teaching of the Church on moral issues, whether to do with the sanctity of life at all stages, or the meaning of sex, love and marriage. Some of these would prevent any Irish children (regardless of what parents might want) from being contaminated by traditional Christian teachings presented in school as 'the truth'. Given these competing ambitions for our country's children, we should count ourselves lucky that there is no fight brewing about the age which science teachers should ascribe to Planet Earth. In the Republic, at least, creation is happily reconciled with evolution.

There is also a battle of wills at the level of officialdom. School managers are now concerned that the State, via the Department of Education and Skills, wants to reduce the influence of patrons, trustees and boards of management in key decisions being made. For example, in the recent Seanad debate on the Education (Amendment) Bill, the Minister for Education and Skills refused to accept amendments that would require the agreement of school management bodies and trade unions to procedures for the redeployment of teachers, or even to procedures for the appointment, suspension or dismissal of teachers.

In a related development, Fianna Fáil wants to change Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act which allows a religious, educational or medical institution to take "action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution". Although the Act doesn't mention homosexuality, and although there has never been a case alleging discrimination against a homosexual person under this section, FF Senator Averil Power claims the situation is 'completely unjust' because a Catholic

school *could* be entitled to refuse to hire a gay or lesbian teacher or principal. Her party leader, Micheál Martin, backs her on this.

The link between these developments is perhaps a failure by the Department of Education and Skills and some politicians to take account of what the Irish Constitution prescribes. The Family is the 'primary and natural educator of the child', according to Article 42.1. The State is entitled, per Article 42.3.2, to require that children 'receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social'. Article 44.2.1 provides that 'freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen', Article 44.2.4 contains a reference to 'schools under the management of different religious denominations' and Article 44.2.5 provides that 'Every religious denomination shall have the right to manage its own affairs, own, acquire and administer property, movable and immovable, and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes.'

The Constitution doesn't resolve all issues. But even a cursory look at the sections containing these clauses is telling. The State is cast in a supporting role when it comes to education, because primary authority rests with the family. People's religious practice is respected and the Constitution envisages that some schools will be under the management of religious denominations, which in turn are entitled to manage their own affairs.

Taking all this together, it is not difficult to see why a clause was inserted into the Employment Equality Act providing that a religious educational or other institution could take action to protect its ethos without being held to discriminate unlawfully. In fact, when the Supreme Court considered this legislation under Article 26 of the Constitution, it noted that, without Section 37, the Employment Equality Bill might be unconstitutional. The Court also referred to the Attorney General's advice/submissions on the subject.

Senator Power has specifically chosen the case of homosexual persons to highlight what she sees as a potential injustice in the ethos exemption. But, in fact, no person's rights are ever absolute to the extent that they may not be even indirectly limited. When it comes to education, surely the rights of parents and children to receive a particular ethos-inspired education should also be taken into account. And why move to vindicate the self-expression of one group to the exclusion of other categories who might fall foul of the ethos exemption? Senator Power's amendment focuses exclusively on discrimination on the grounds of "civil status"

or "sexual orientation" and not, for example, on religious belief. But it is difficult to see why the law should accord stronger individual rights in relation to sexual freedom than apply, for example, to religious freedom. Take the case of a convert to Islam who might apply for the principalship of a Catholic school, or who might like to recommend the superior merits of the Muslim faith in religion class. If the right of a Catholic or Protestant school to safeguard its ethos has any content, the school must be allowed to take the person's religious 'private life' into account when deciding upon employment or when deliberating upon action to maintain its religious ethos. Most people would see this as a reasonable exercise of the school's rights. Might some be less sympathetic if a civil partnership, and not adherence to the Muslim faith, was the presenting issue for the school? Maybe so, but from the point of view of denominational education neither situation is fully compatible with Christian teaching, no matter how virtuous the individual persons involved may be.

The difficulty lies in striking the right balance between the ethos rights of an institution and the education rights of parents and children on the one hand, and teachers' personal rights such as rights to privacy or conscience on the other. As a matter of common sense the more public the activity of a hypothetical teacher the more reasonable it becomes to consider such activity as potentially falling under Section 37 of the Act. So a denominational school should be able to invoke Section 37 in some form if a teacher decides to lecture students on how the sacrament of marriage attacks the rights of homosexual and polygamous partners, or if a teacher proselytises on behalf of Islam on the town's main street after school hours. But the more the teacher's activities move towards the private end of the spectrum the less applicable Section 37 becomes. The fact that there have been no controversies over the invocation or operation of Section 37 suggests that Catholic schools get this point – even if it is difficult to establish hard and fast rules for all potential scenarios. People will differ about the appropriate course of action to be taken. In the end, the level of sympathy for school management may depend on the extent to which people see the school, as distinct from the State, as the educator of their children.

It is also worth considering that implicit within Section 37 is the requirement for proportionate intervention – "reasonable" is mentioned in both Section 37 (1) (a) and (b). That means that a school cannot just sack a teacher on the grounds that they may have done something contrary to Christian teaching in their spare time. Prudence, discretion and reasonableness are all required when deciding

what course of action may or may not be necessary, another term expressly mentioned in Section 37, in order to protect the school's ethos. What Senator Power's amendment may risk doing is to remove from the school the right to protect its ethos in the context of issues which go to the heart of Church teaching on marriage, sexuality, love and commitment.

Our current Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn, understands these issues. He is intellectually engaged by his brief and brings his own set of ideas to the job. He describes himself as a 'practising atheist' while expressing respect for the intellectual credibility of the religious worldview. He appears to respect the right of denominational schools to foster religious values in the classroom. Over the next few years, he must attempt to reconcile the competing claims of the State to which citizens owe loyalty and the religious denominations to which most Irish families adhere.

The competing aspirations discussed above, as well as the need to accommodate non-Christian children in an education system permeated by the religiously-inspired integrated syllabus, all point to the need for greater diversity in school patronage and ethos. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector has kick-started this debate but diversity in education is also a question for secondary schools.

The Catholic Church, most obviously through the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Diarmuid Martin, has made it clear that it supports diversity in school patronage and that it doesn't want to be the only choice of education provider available to parents who do not want a Catholic education for their children. The Church has made it equally clear, however, that it does wish to provide distinctive Catholic education for Catholic and non-Catholic families who want it.

Last year the Minister took his cue from Dr Martin's assessment that about 50% of people in his diocese wanted Catholic education. But any Government aspirations to transfer the patronage of half of the country's schools soon appeared unrealistic. The Catholic Church stated that local communities would have to be consulted with, and be supportive of, any divesting of local schools. It also emerged that if in an urban area like Dublin the divesting of a certain percentage of schools could be contemplated with tranquillity, this was only because there would be other Catholic schools available to parents in those areas. The same cannot be said for most rural areas where there is realistically only a choice between one local school and home-schooling.

Though it might appear otherwise, the divesting of some schools under Catholic patronage is the cleanest, fairest way to cater for diversity. The alternative, since building and resourcing new alternative schools is not an option, is to turn denominational schools into something akin to Educate Together schools. Imagine schools under Catholic patronage with no crucifix on the wall or, alternatively, an array of different religious symbols on display. No specific prayers before classes. No school Masses. No preparation for sacraments at primary level during school hours. No specifically Christian proposal about the meaning of life or about what is morally good and true.

If the Department of Education and Skills wishes to move towards such an education landscape, it will not do so immediately. Gradual, piecemeal reforms may be proposed, including legislation akin to that proposed by Senator Power to weaken the autonomy of school managers in employment decisions. Proposals for change will be backed up by reference to situations where non-Catholic children feel excluded by the preparation of children for sacraments during school time. We will hear from teachers who resent having to teach the precepts of a faith to which they do not subscribe. And we will hear the economic argument for less religion and more science.

Though there is little doubt that these and other arguments will be made in the months and years ahead, it is far from certain that they will prevail to the extent that denominational education will be totally, or even significantly, suppressed. There are many reasons for this:

- Catholic and other denominational patrons are working together to assert their common interest in running schools that reflect their distinctive value systems.
- The Constitutional guarantees cited above could be invoked against any State interference that is too extreme.
- There is widespread sympathy for the idea that the needs of parents and children should take precedence in any debate about rights in schools.
- Denominational schooling enjoys widespread support across society, including among parents who are not religiously active.
- Christian values are widely seen as promoting the development of civic and social responsibility in children.

- Denominational schools have a good record, in Ireland and internationally, in preparing students academically and vocationally.
- Many parents want to send their children to schools similar to the ones they attended themselves.
- The Churches will not have a problem in finding articulate lay voices, many of them parents, to make a case for their schools.
- Education is seen as a 'bread-and-butter' issue by politicians and voters alike and local representatives will be sensitive to any disquiet felt on the ground.

However, if arguments in favour of denominational schools are to make moral, and not just political sense, two things need to happen. Genuine efforts must be made to provide greater diversity of school patronage and ethos across the country. This is important, not just to vindicate the rights of parents who do not wish their children to be educated within a Catholic or Christian worldview, but also so that Christian educators can be confident of promoting their identity without worrying that they are proposing Christian beliefs to people who do not wish to hear them.

Proponents of Christian education must also promote the value of what they provide, rather than be cast in the role of defenders of the status quo. One of the ironies of the current debate is that Catholic and other denominational schools are already very sensitive to the need for inclusion. The crucifix may be on the wall and there may be statues of the Blessed Virgin to be seen, but the Christian emphasis on the dignity and welfare of each person, the welcoming of the stranger and the accommodation of difference already informs the attitudes of school managers, principals and teachers.

In fact, if there is a threat to human dignity in our schools, it doesn't come from flexing of any narrow religious perspectives during religion or other classes. It comes from the narrowing of subject choice due to cutbacks, the scaling down of pastoral supports such as guidance counselling and the pressure on the timetable from an unforgiving and sometimes frightening points system. In a society experiencing more family breakdown than there used to be, where many young people succumb too easily to the temptation of alcohol, drugs and hedonistic lifestyles, with increased suicide rates among the young, and fears about limited economic and career prospects, it has never been more important that our schools be places of hope.

This is where Christian schools have a trump card. Precisely by articulating a strong message about the meaning of life, schools support parents in giving young people what they need to cope with the uncertainties and vicissitudes of life. The Christian belief that we have a loving creator, and that each person has an awesome dignity and a divine destiny, is not mere poetry. It is not a fairy story or metaphor. For Christians, it is a truth arrived at through faith, and it is as significant and as worthy of communication as anything to be taught as truth in history or science class. It is not something to be reduced to a class about comparative religion or an item to be dealt with under the heading of 'different world cultures'.

Christian education is intellectually credible, a point that is widely missed by its critics. Advances in cosmological and evolutionary knowledge do not detract from the fact that the ultimate origin and end of existence are metaphysical questions standing outside of and prior to science. These limit questions, the very core of philosophical reflection, are literally awe-inspiring. Openness to mystery must therefore be a key feature of a fully rational, intellectual, enquiring life. The proposal of Christian faith opens up, instead of closes down, children's capacity to reflect on the great and perennial questions of existence. The typical Catholic school balances the development of mind and soul. Students are encouraged to be reasonable, to know that the scientific method and rational enquiry are pathways to the truth about life and living. But they are also encouraged to know the appropriate limits of scientific knowledge, specifically in how practical reasoning rather than scientific theorising is key to understanding ethics and the good life, and to know that the heart and soul must be engaged if there is to be appreciation of art, literature and ultimately the absoluteness of love.

The right to propose education according to Christian truths also rests on the fact that denominational schools were built by people who believed this faith and that education in these schools is funded today by taxpayers many of whom either subscribe to this belief or are willing to choose education within this belief system for their children. It is true that only by providing a genuine alternative model of school can we gauge the precise level of support for this kind of education, but it is also true that there is no significant opposition on the ground to this vision of education. In general, people value and support their schools as currently constituted.

Christian educators perhaps need to recognise the value of what they have, and the deep well of appreciation in society for the values that flow from Christian education. The Christian faith deserves to be treated with care in schools. Instead of being dumbed down and reduced to mere class discussion, with no status other than that of opinions to be discarded if inconvenient, they can be proposed confidently as the pathway not just to personal fulfilment but to solidarity with others. Students receiving Christian education in schools are preparing for a life in which, confronted with joys and sorrows, they will choose daily whether to believe and accept this faith or not.

In the end, denominational schools will survive not because of political or philosophical arguments, important as these might be, but because of what they deliver to people in the community. When schools offer children the sense that there is an ultimate meaning to their existence, promote love of God and solidarity with neighbour, and pay attention to personal, social, intellectual and career development, they provide invaluable support to society. And most of our schools are built on this great tradition.

It's not clear whose views and values will prevail in the years ahead, or how the varying aspirations for education will be balanced. But it's a long time since things were this interesting.

DR. DAVID TUOHY SJ

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## Governance in Education – A Church Ministry of the Future

*The Church is charged with announcing the Good News of God's love for each person. Education is a core element of that mission. Church documents typically reflect on education in terms of the personal call of teachers and the invitation to students to personal transformation in their own growth and in their future contribution to society. Comparatively little attention has been given to the corporate dimension of the Catholic school, and in particular to the role of governance.*

*This article explores some issues for the Church in developing the ministry of governance.*

The last fifty years have seen major changes in Catholic voluntary secondary schools. In 1966, just before the Free Education Scheme was introduced, religious made up almost 50% of personnel in these schools. Today, they make up less than 5%. The vast majority of principals are now lay, and Boards of Management, under lay leadership, are responsible for maintaining the Catholic ethos of the schools. Increasingly, congregations are looking to new structures for trusteeship, setting up collaborative Trusts with other congregations in Le Chéile and Ceist, and developing new structures in ERST, Loreto and Spiritans. In each of these Trusts, lay people play a significant role. Usually, Church language with regard to mission does not figure in how these lay people think of their work, and some may even be reluctant to adopt some of that language. In this article, I explore possible responses to the new context of governance and how it is viewed in the Church. I explore the language related to ministry, and particularly how ministry is linked to baptism. In particular, I reflect on how governance contributes to the triple archetype of priest, prophet and king that was so central to the Vatican Council's re-visioning of the Church. I explore the royal archetype in some detail and develop some implications for the Church of the future.

## The Context of Ministry

Catholic schools have seen the gradual disappearance of members of the religious congregations. At times, people old enough to remember nuns, brothers and priests in religious habits reflect with nostalgia on the "good old days" of Catholic education. The transition in individual schools has been gradual. On a national level, the inevitable changes have been faced with varied senses of crises. Frequently, the question was posed – what will be the future of Catholic education when the religious are no longer involved? In my own experience of working with the Le Chéile Schools Trust, the initial concerns stemmed from the same question. We saw our work as in some way re-visioning or re-founding Catholic education. However, as the work progressed and the different congregations shared their experience of trusteeship and shared what was happening within their schools, it became clear that the real issue was not the future of Catholic schools, but somehow, the future of the Church. There was a basic confidence in the "present" and the "future" of Catholic education. We realised that the schools were staffed by professional educators who had a commitment to visionary leadership. The schools worked from a strong sense of Christian and human values. They witnessed to the importance of the spiritual dimension of life and offered opportunities to teachers, parents and especially to young people, to experience, explore and engage with different aspects of their own spiritual journey. Yes, at times there was a crisis of language. Leaders struggled with their ability to frame the experience of education and schooling in the context of a spiritual and Church reality. It was difficult to make connections with a Church that was in crisis; that had betrayed its own core vision in the way it treated those in its care and had become overly "institutional", failing to resonate with the deeper desires of young people exploring their hopes and dreams. The issue in setting up the Trust was then seen not so much as "What can Catholic education learn from the new situation of the Congregations?" Rather, the challenge was how to respond to the reality of the good work that was going on in Catholic schools and how to support that work into the future. It became clear that the onus was on the Church, through the Congregations, to respond to what was happening in Catholic schools, and not on the schools to adapt to the changes that beset the congregations. The aim was to affirm the professional work of Catholic educators and to give a voice to their commitment and expertise. This gave us a new paradigm from which the Trust emerged.

In 2009, Benedict XVI spoke to delegates at the opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome and pointed to the importance of this paradigm shift.

*It is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognised as "co-responsible" for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity*<sup>45</sup>

The change in mindset takes place on a number of levels. In particular, the terminology of lay person has negative overtones. The dictionary defines it as "non-professional, someone who is not an expert". In Church terms, there is often a sense that the laity are generally passive with regard to the mission of the Church, although they can be called to help out the clergy. The Vatican Council clearly stated that this was a false view of the Christian vocation. It defined the Church as "missionary by its very nature",<sup>46</sup> "a universal sacrament of salvation"<sup>47</sup> and a "leaven in the world",<sup>48</sup> and affirmed that all were called to participate in that mission through baptism. Lakeland (2007)<sup>49</sup> contends that the practice of infant baptism has focused almost entirely on the initiation of the individual into the believing community rather than on the call to mission and ministry. Also, in Church language, the term ministry has narrow overtones, focusing on the liturgical service given within the believing community (e.g. lay ministers of the Eucharist). The wider sense of ministry (as used in dealing with different aspects of government – finance, education, justice etc) needs to become part of our mindset when thinking about the external mission of the Church. The change involves moving away from seeing educators as having a personal spirituality within the Church to seeing educational leadership and governance as part of the corporate dimension of the Church, as a response of highly skilled and professional Christians to the call of baptism.

## Ministry Based on Baptism

The basis of all ministry in the Church is baptism. In baptism, each person is anointed:

*As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.*<sup>50</sup>

These three roles can be seen as archetypes, or models, of different aspects of ministry. They are not related to specific offices within the Church. Each of them belongs to all of us as Christians. Part of our Christian formation is to understand what the three archetypes mean in our present culture, and in particular roles we play. In ancient Israel, the role of the priest was linked to the liturgical rites of the temple, performing symbolic actions to remind the people of their relationship with God. They were guardians of tradition, remembering and reciting it on formal occasions. The prophet was a person specially called by God to reveal his message. He acted as a commentator on the lives of king, priests and people, interpreting the present so that others could see their actions in the light of God's word. He pointed to the religious meaning of everyday events and demanded that what was celebrated in symbolic and liturgical rites be translated to an authentic lifestyle. The role of the king was to give protection and bring justice. In general, protection was given against enemies from outside, whereas the internal role of the king was to rule wisely and with justice – the most famous king in this regard being Solomon.

In education, the leader is steward of a vision of education, reminding others of that vision and presiding at formal occasions that have symbolic significance for that vision (priest). Leaders also reflect on the current life of the school, and constantly challenge and encourage teachers, parents and students to a more authentic and holistic view of education (prophet). The managerial role of ensuring the school runs in a smooth and just manner can be linked with the role of king. In secular language, the terms used might refer to symbolic (priest), vision (prophet) and governance (king). In this reflection, I would like to consider at a deeper level how those involved in the governance of education participate in the biblical archetype of King.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome, May 26, 2009

<sup>46</sup> Second Vatican Council: Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church. Ad Gentes, # 2

<sup>47</sup> Second Vatican Council: Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church. Ad Gentes, # 2

<sup>48</sup> Second Vatican Council: Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World. Gaudium et Spes, #40

<sup>49</sup> Lakeland, Paul Catholicism at the Crossroads: How the Laity can save the Church. New York: Continuum, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Baptismal Service: anointing with Chrism.

Who do I mean by those involved in governance? In particular, I am thinking of the specific role played by those on Boards of Management. I am also thinking of some of the new roles that have emerged in recent years in various trusts, where individuals take particular responsibility for overseeing the work of many schools. These roles are being played by “lay people”, people who are committed to the development of a holistic education, inspired by and reflecting the teaching of Jesus and operating within a community of shared values. They bring a high level of professional expertise to these roles and they are now being asked to develop their work in a context where there will be less dependence on the visible presence of congregational members. There is a need to develop a new language that helps frame reflection on this ministry within the Church, and to learn from a “baptism-based” mission rather than a mission centred within religious congregations or the priesthood. The focus in this article on the baptismal archetype of king hopefully contributes to this. The aim is not to exclude the other two archetypes, as aspects of the role of prophet and priest are also present in the governance role. Rather, the aim is to find a possible template to begin a wider reflection and sharing on the theme.

We are hampered in developing this theme by our images of kingship. When we think back to ancient times, we have images of pharaohs and Caesars who thought of themselves as gods. They exercised power in an arbitrary way and they are portrayed mostly in heroic or tragic terms with regard to battle campaigns they waged. In the cinema, the portrayal of historical royals often explores political intrigues within the royal court. The emergence of republics after the American and French revolutions was symbolic of the rejection of arbitrary power residing in any one individual. In the current days of republics and democracies, the royal role is more ceremonial and symbolic. These images inform modern images of governance. Unfortunately, images related to democracy and individual liberty do not find an easy home in Church language, and can cloud our ability to appreciate the richness of the imagery.

The image of the king in the Old Testament has its origins in the heroic images of David and Solomon. The focus of their reigns was to secure prosperity for the people by victories over external enemies and to secure peace and justice by victory over internal enemies. The history of the kings of Israel shows them constantly giving in to temptations of aligning themselves with the practices of despotism and idolatry common among their pagan neighbours, but the history is also one of purification of the notion of kingship. At the time of the

Exile in the sixth century BC, the monarchy was abandoned and the prophets focused on a future king who would bring joy, victory, peace and justice to the people, a kingship that was based on service. The final purification came when Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God and he was finally revealed as the “King of the Jews” at his crucifixion. The kingdom – and the kingship of Jesus – comes through the preaching of the gospel – a kingdom of good news, light, healing and freedom. The royal mission that Jesus undertook is caught up in these images, images that are very relevant to the work of Catholic education, and the role of governance. One way of exploring this image is to focus on the function of “boundary management” in the role of the King.

### Exploring the Royal Archetype

In the time of Old Testament, boundary management consisted of protecting the kingdom against its enemies. At first this involved expansion through conquering them. Later, the kingdom had to defend itself from external attacks either directly or through concordats with others. In the early Church, boundary management involved the initial spread of the Good News to different parts of the Roman Empire and managing the way different local churches responded to the early preaching. This early experience of expansion was followed by a period of consolidation, both in terms of the development of Church structures and the development of doctrine through the early councils. A similar experience of expansion through missionary activity paralleled the exploration of new geographic horizons in the Americas and in the East in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which also saw a period of defensiveness in the experience of the Reformation and Counter Reformation. Benedict XVI has characterised the context of preaching the gospel today as a world where the dominant culture is marked by subjectivism, moral relativism, hedonism and practical materialism giving rise to an erroneous or superficial vision of God and the human person that stands between faith and human knowledge, faith and modern science, faith and the commitment to justice.<sup>51</sup> In that context, the focus is not on geographic boundaries, but on mental and cultural boundaries. The boundaries are within, not between, people. This is a key focus of the ministry of education, and involves a dialogue with a diversity of people, with a diversity of cultures as well as a dialogue within the Church as to its own identity within that dialogue. These challenges define the work of boundary management in the governance of education.

## A Dialogue with People

The process of migration poses a challenge for many countries. Most countries have processes that control their borders, frequently demanding visas for entry and residence. Sometimes, the control is tight. In other countries, it is loose. In the process of globalisation, there has been greater freedom of movement of peoples across boundaries, giving rise to more diverse populations. This has brought many economic benefits in terms of the work force to the host countries, but it also poses challenges of cultural assimilation and integration. The challenge within any country is to respect the diversity of people. It requires a mindset that is not threatened by difference, but that can see the richness of the human endeavour in the diversity, that comes to appreciate the importance of one's own contribution, thus enhancing one's own identity.

A similar situation exists in most Catholic schools. The community of students, parents and even teachers is made up of Catholics, Christians of other denominations, people of other faiths and those who have none. Many have little formal contact with the Church outside of school, and some find difficulty accepting its teachings. The focus of the Catholic school is not so much an *education for Catholics*, but a *Catholic education for all*. This brings new challenges for the school – developing a mindset that confidently lives out of its own inspirational vision of education, yet welcomes and learns from other “cultures”, celebrating the common search for ultimate meaning and learning how different contexts have shaped that search and given rise to different traditional responses. This context affords the opportunity to explore new images of being Catholic in a changing world, giving living witness to the respect and dignity of each person as a child of God. Yet, it also brings dangers of not affirming one's own beliefs for fear of offending others; of tolerating others rather than accepting and learning from them; of becoming overly defensive about certain practices within one's own tradition rather than focusing on core values.

In this context, the challenge for the school community is to witness to the kingdom of God, where people are reconciled to one another and to creation. A key role for governance in education is (a) to ensure that the diversity of people in the school is respected and (b) that a language develops to promote a dialogue where learning and affirmation are central.

## A Dialogue with Culture

From the Catholic perspective, the curriculum reveals the complexity and the wonder of creation.

*The Catholic school should teach its pupils to discern in the voice of the universe the Creator Whom it reveals and, in the achievements of science, to know God and man better.*<sup>52</sup>

The curriculum introduces students to the vastness and profundity of the different disciplines of human knowledge. It also teaches them to look critically at that knowledge, to understand the values and the possibilities that it reveals. The belief that creation, as understood within the autonomous disciplines of the study of science, history and social structures, reveals God at work in a history of salvation, leads the Catholic school to promote the religious dimension as a key to integrating knowledge and life.

We live in an information age, with wide access to all sorts of information and knowledge. This gives rise to an openness to new ideas and values, and promotes a sense of freedom of choice and an enhanced sense of the individual. We also see new technologies and methodologies in education, but this development has also posed problems of fragmentation in the curriculum. The issue of depth and integration of learning is a constant challenge – a counter-cultural demand in an approach dominated by a “surfing” mentality. The danger is that religious education becomes part of the fragmentation process, and is seen as just one more subject on an already overcrowded menu. Its study becomes a surface knowledge about religion rather than a personal engagement with its main concerns. Like other subjects, it gives in to the rote recall of information which stays with the student up to the time of the examination and then quickly dissipates.

Another challenge within the curriculum is the “commodification” of knowledge, where knowledge and qualifications are seen as “objects” that can be priced and traded for other benefits. Education credentials have become a currency for social and economic advancement, or for maintaining a position in society. This has resulted in a strong focus on the accountability of schools for the “product” of learning, judged by league tables of student credentials. This gives rise to two tensions – judging people by “what they have” rather than “who they are” and viewing the different subjects in utilitarian terms, as to how they contribute to one's final results, rather than seeing their contribution to holistic development. In this regard, the humanities have become a casualty in the modern curriculum.

Catholic education is person-centred. It goes beyond training in skills and the competition for qualifications. It helps individuals to seek wholeness, truth and hope in their lives. It promotes integrity in work, relationships and leisure. It sees the person as essentially social, and therefore promotes a sense of community based on solidarity, the promotion of justice and making a difference. The curriculum of the Catholic school is part of the dialogue between faith and culture. It is not so much the teaching of a doctrine as it is giving people a lens through which they can view the world and focus on what is essential, and in that focus, they find a loving God. Managing the boundary between the integrity of the disciplines and the integrating role of the religious perspective is a key element of modern education governance.

### Identity of the School

Just as the Catholic school has experienced major shifts in its population and in the curriculum it teaches, the national context in which it exists has also become more diversified in terms of people and culture. As a result, the Catholic school has to compete in a different way to preserve its identity, both in its appeal to parents and students as a place for education, and in terms of securing funds for its effective development. A by-product of the process of globalisation of culture is a level of transnational homogeneity. One aspect of this trend can be named as secularism, where faith issues are consigned to the realm of the private, as if they are simply personal preferences. The demand for the separation of Church and State is often promoted as a call for the state to be “neutral” with regard to religion as opposed to being “impartial” between different faiths, denominations and those who have life philosophies that exclude God and religion. In recent debates on Human Rights and Religion in Education, in the Forum on Patronage in Primary Schools and in issues related to the development of non-denominational education, many submissions have used faith in God as a symbol of what divides and polarises citizens and communities. Many would deny faith groups the right to any support in promoting their own identity through an “immersion” experience of education. There have been suggestions that, in return for financial support from the state, faith schools should be controlled by external policies on who they should admit to their schools and even to how they should teach religion within the school. Frequently, there has been a narrow, and at times ill-informed, polemic focus on one dimension of ethos, with little credit given to Catholic schools for their contribution to intellectual, cultural, social and linguistic aspects of social cohesion.

The response of the Catholic school is not to fall back on claiming rights and privileges. It must confidently point to the contribution it does make to the common good. The concern of Catholic schools has been to help form citizens deeply committed to public service and helping others. It has promoted a holistic approach to the human person, seeking to integrate the economic concerns of an improved “standard of living” through employment and work with concerns for a “quality of life” through personal fulfilment.

A key element of identity is to develop beyond a bland generic “faith-based” or “gospel-based” value system to a mission with enough specificity to embed it in a particular approach to reading the Scripture and to make it identifiable as an intentional spiritual response to the call of the Holy Spirit in the culture of the day.

Don Marquis, the American poet, once wrote “An idea is not responsible for the people who believe in it”. For me, this phrase captures some of the challenge of boundary management in education. The vision of the Church in dialogue with others and with culture has not always been an obvious characteristic of the Church. The Church many parents and grandparents of to-day’s students grew up in worked from different images – closed, legalistic, hierarchic and confident that it alone held the truth. This is part of the “baggage” of the Church, and often engenders a level of scepticism when Catholic schools promote themselves to others. At times, even within the Church, this vision is questioned. The effectiveness of Catholic schools is often evaluated in terms of their contribution to institutional compliance - the number of young people attending Mass in parishes. Yet, Catholic schools remain the school of choice for many parents because of the excellence of their general education and their approach to holistic development, which includes faith issues. The Catholic schools of to-day cannot be held responsible for those who believed in and promoted a different vision of the Catholic school in different times. However, they are responsible for what they now believe in and promote. Increasingly, it is lay people who manage the boundary between that vision and those who come to Catholic schools. They are the ones that announce the kingdom of God to today’s young people.

## The Response of the Church

In thinking about the future of governance in Catholic education as ministry, a key element has been to reflect on the involvement of individuals in the corporate responsibility for the mission of the Church. It was pointed out that this has practical implications for the Church's response to those who will be involved in this ministry, and this response will involve vision, formation and shared authority.

### Vision

At the core of the development of ministry is vision. The Church has already articulated a vision of education as central to its mission, for individuals involved in teaching and leadership roles in all schools, and particularly for the Catholic school as an institution. It is important that this vision is constantly reaffirmed in a language that links with new developments in leadership and curriculum studies, and that takes into account changes in education policy in different countries. The language will need to be accessible to those involved in governance. It cannot be prescriptive with regard to particular outcomes, but will promote further theological and professional reflection. Elements of this vision will include links to:

- *Gospel* – the ministry of teaching and education is an imitation of the teaching ministry of Jesus. He developed an authentic interpretation of tradition, linking it with a deeper understanding of what gives life. He challenged people to integrate their secular skills of building houses, harvesting crops and reading the weather with their ability to read the spiritual realities of the signs of their times.
- *Incarnation* – Catholic education is holistic, and helps students engage with the world around them. It will reflect the challenge of developing the dialogue between faith and reason, faith and culture, and faith and science as experienced by the questions and experiences of young people and teachers. Catholic education is also embedded in particular systems, and must share, and contribute, to national policy aspirations.
- *The Easter message* – the vision of Catholic education works from a vision of the human person that includes the promise of a life beyond the joys and tragedies of this life. It focuses on the “kingdom of God” that is primarily an interior reality, but that is seen in a commitment to justice for all.

- *Church* – the experience of Catholic education is an experience of community, where each individual is valued and the common bond between individuals is promoted. For those involved in governance that sense of community will inform a corporate involvement in the mission of the Church.
- *Inclusivity* – the community of Catholic education is characterised by ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, seeing God at work in all people.

The language of this vision needs to be faithful to both the communal (internal) and mission (external) orientation of the Church, and will also seek to establish the link between the external mission and the internal symbols that support that mission.

### Formation

If Catholic education is to reflect a spirituality of mission, then individuals must be educated in and formed by that spirituality. In the past, religious congregations provided this formation for their members. What will such formation look like in the future, and what does it look like for “lay” ministers? Some hints may be found in the way religious congregations have sought to enhance a connection between their schools and the “charism of the founder”.

A key to understanding charism is story – the story of the founder and the inspiration that attracted others to join and set up the congregation. Then there is the story of the development of the congregation, and how it adapted to changing cultural circumstances, interpreting the inspiration and developing new responses. The third aspect of the story is to show how those involved in schools today are involved in the continuation of that story, promoting their understanding of and engagement with the original inspiration. In looking to formation of future governors in education, a key will be their engagement with the story of Catholic education, both as the Church's mission and also the specific history of individual schools and congregations. Formation involves giving time for individuals to (a) understand the language, values and vision; (b) reflect on the development of the story in the past; (c) appreciate the application of the story in the present by linking it with their own experiences, integrating these experiences into the story and (d) dream about the importance of the story in the future. Providing space and opportunity for such formation is a key investment for the future.

## Shared Authority

The role of Public Juridic Person (PJP) in Canon Law is a Church structure which allows individuals and groups to play a formal role in the ministry of the Church, with legal links to the diocesan bishop and the National Episcopal Conference. The new Trusts in Irish education are developing this identity and this will make a critical contribution to the development of the Church in Ireland. If the recognition of the Trusts as corporate PJPs is simply the establishment of independent, autonomous bodies whose compliance is open to the occasional evaluation of a clerical Church, then I believe, a major opportunity for growth will have been lost. The development of the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools and the Catholic Schools Partnership has shown how committed lay people can work in partnership to advance Catholic education. It is important that this experience is built on in the future, and that ways are found to move from purely advisory functions to involving these bodies in decision-making processes. The religious congregations have made a strong commitment to a new vision of governance in education, delegating the authority of their schools to a charism of baptism and finding new ways of journeying as partners in mission. This is creating a new energy, a new Pentecost in the Church. This energy needs to be acknowledged. Recognising in this energy the "co-responsible" role of the laity for the mission of the Church is, as Benedict XVI has said, calling the Church to new paradigms of authority and partnership. This journey is only beginning.

MARIE CÉLINE CLEGG

# The Future is Now – A Reflection on Leadership Development

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## Some Leadership Development Initiatives over 25 Years

The whole concept of leadership in the context of educational discourse in Ireland is relatively recent. Paddy Flood was National Co-ordinator of the *Leadership Development for Schools Programme* (LDS), now subsumed into the *Professional Development Support Programme for Teachers* (PDST). He has provided a historical perspective on the evolving role of school leaders in Irish primary and post-primary schools in his contribution to a recent publication (O'Sullivan and Westburnham, 2011). In *Leading and Managing Irish Schools: A Historical Perspective*, there is a very apt description of the 1970s and 1980s as a 'period of incubation for school leadership'. It is interesting to note, however, that even during this 'incubation' period, people whose vision enabled them to recognise the importance of leadership development sought some means of preparing those who might take on the role of school principal, for example. It was as a result of such vision on the part of a Loreto Provincial Superior that I found myself as a 'young' Religious attending a course on leadership in the late 70s run by the Irish Management Institute (IMI) for business leaders. It was an unlikely milieu in which to expect to find a small group of Sisters in full religious garb! Looking at the scenario from the current perspective, it could possibly be seen as an image of transition into a new and very different future.

It is interesting to note, also, the foresight of the Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS) in organising a 'think-in', although unlikely to have been called that in 1988, when a group of Principals and other educationalists were invited to Blessington to consider possible approaches to the 'training' of Principals into the future. I have a clear recollection of this gathering and particularly of the contribution of Eamonn Stack, former Chief Inspector, Paul Meany, former President of AMCSS/JMB and others who have, in the meantime, clearly made their mark on Irish education. This initiative was indicative of forward thinking on the part of CMCSS, considering that it was not until 1991 that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) observed that the role of the Principal had developed in such a way as to necessitate training for the role. Another influential development in the 90s was the arrival on the scene of the *Secondary School Principals' Association of Ireland* (SSPAI). Including in its membership religious and lay Principals working in close collaboration, this group had as a focus the professional development of school leaders on the basis of a clear understanding that living on the heritage of the past was not enough.

Throughout the 1990s, CMCSS provided preliminary training for newly appointed Principals and, indeed, continues to do so. While the emphasis was undoubtedly on managerial skills at the time, efforts were made to include presentations on such topics as 'Leading People', the latter sometimes, however, being perceived by some at the time as 'the softer side of life'! There was agreement between all the partners, however, that more and more needed to be done at national level and the *National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals* (NAPD) and the *Irish Primary Principals' Network* (IPPN) were both very influential in ensuring that the leadership development agenda was pursued. Eventually, the introduction of the 'Leadership Development for Schools Programme' (LDS) in 2002 was a significant initiative welcomed by all involved in the education enterprise. The fact that LDS provided for cross-sectoral leadership development has been a major contributory factor to its success. Another distinctive characteristic of LDS has been its emphasis on the person of the leader. Recognition of the need for leadership development at every level within the system resulted in a variety of programmes for principals, deputy principals, a postgraduate programme for aspiring school leaders and specially designed courses for those exercising leadership in special and disadvantaged schools.

OECD initiated an international study into school leadership and the subsequent report, *Improving School Leadership*, published in 2008, provided a picture of the experience of school leadership in 22 countries and highlighted the pivotal role of leadership in the entire school experience while also reporting on increasing challenges for those in the role. In *Improving School Leadership, Background Report – Ireland*, there was reference to the fact that an important aspect of leadership is the management of change. It was acknowledged also that the educational landscape had undergone a sustained period of change in Ireland and that school Principals had been key figures in managing change at school level. It had become clear to us in the Irish context that Principals in our schools were well and truly 'stepping up to the plate' in the face of rapid change in the system and more and more demands for accountability at every level in an increasingly regulated environment.

In the light of the OECD reports, the *Regional Training Unit in Northern Ireland* (RTU) and *Leadership Development for Schools* (LDS) commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an all-island research study into school leadership in June 2008. The recently published report, *School Leadership Matters, An empirical assessment of the attractiveness of principalship in the*

*North of Ireland and the South of Ireland* (SLM, 2011) outlines the reasons why some teachers apply for the post of principalship or headship and others do not. An interesting finding in SLM is that the common perception of principalship is negative, particularly from the perspective of teachers. In contrast, principals express satisfaction about their own role but this is not widely known. In its recommendations in relation to developing new leaders, the report places particular emphasis on succession planning and formal and informal leadership development (Recommendation, 7.19 and 7.20).

One almost hesitates to highlight the emphasis in the report on distributed leadership at this particular time when schools are experiencing serious reduction of in-school management posts as a result of the current austerity measures being applied in relation to education in Ireland. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest, however, that, in spite of the current economic reality and its impact on budgetary allocation to schools, teachers are increasingly being provided with opportunities to lead, rather than merely carrying out administrative tasks. A recommendation in the SLM report clearly calling for action is that training on succession planning be provided for principals and boards of management to ensure that it 'becomes embedded in the system' (SLM, Recommendation 14). A further recommendation relates to defining the role of boards of management in relation to leadership development while remembering that board members are voluntary and that any actions should 'avoid undue burden' (SLM, Recommendation 17). We would do well to bear in mind the onus on boards of management to ensure that leadership development is high on their agenda.

### Acknowledging Current Reality

Having been invited to make a presentation at a Conference for the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools in Toronto in 2009, I found it necessary to familiarise myself somewhat with the Canadian scene. This attempt included reading two books: *Catholic Education, Ensuring a Future* (Mulligan, 2005) and *Catholic Education, A Light of Truth* (Murphy, 2007). The image presented in the 'foreword' to Mulligan's book has stayed with me. The Old Testament Book of Kings depicts the Assyrian siege on the city of Jerusalem which is surrounded by a huge wall [2 Kings 18:1-27]. Amid all the clamour, the prophet comes and calls the people of Jerusalem together and tells them that it is time for a very serious conversation to take place *behind the wall* among God's people, a conversation concerning the events of the times in which they are living.

Mulligan refers to this scene as the locus for two conversations that must take place NOW, at *this* time, at what he describes as this *defining moment* in Catholic education in Canada. Those engaged in Catholic education are the people "behind the wall". They are being summoned to engage in a very serious conversation regarding the future direction; yes, even the survival of Catholic education. They are being challenged by the people at the wall to define themselves and to articulate their distinctiveness as a publicly funded educational institution.

Mulligan writes passionately about Catholic education as an enduring but fragile gift and one that must not be taken for granted, one that can easily be lost. He is conscious of Newfoundland and Labrador where Catholic schools no longer exist. Little or no relevance for us here in Ireland, one might say, and yet we too have some critical challenges to face in order to ensure that, while honouring and warmly welcoming diversity of educational provision in Ireland, we understand our identity so that we can make a specific contribution to that diversity. I hesitate to emphasise the relevance of the image of Mulligan's 'wall' in the Irish setting lest it be mistakenly construed as presenting a defensive stance on the part of Catholic schools! I would extend the image, however, beyond the conversation 'behind the wall' and suggest that our conversation must also take place in the 'public space'. The 'public space' includes the economic, social and political arena, where a confidence about our identity enables us to claim our entitlement as partners within the educational landscape into the future.

Our former President, Mary McAleese, has spoken of the 'millstone of the Murphy/Ryan and other reports to be carried for a long time on the way ahead, just as the millstone of the massive fiscal mistakes will similarly have to be carried for some time to come into the future' (McAleese, 2011). She goes on to speak, however, about the profound belief that there can be healing, there can be renewal, there can be a 'change for the better'. Such healing and renewal are likely to be greatly influenced by informed leaders of faith and courage such as we fortunately have in our schools and who are prepared to step forward and renew the Beatitude-centred charism at the heart of authentic Catholic education. I am reminded of the words also spoken by President Mary McAleese at the opening of a Conference on 'School Culture and Ethos' held in Dublin in 2000:

*Sincere and worthy words written in mission statements are tested day in and day out by the lived lives of countless tens of thousands of young people. They know whether the words stack up, whether they mean what they say.*

These words present a challenging message, not only for the individual school, but for all those involved in leadership roles in education

Having recently had an opportunity to examine the various approaches to leadership development for school personnel in the UK and Australia, I was struck by a common thread running through various programmes irrespective of whether they were for formal academic certification, or otherwise. This common thread relates to an emphasis on the importance of the leader having an understanding of the particular school context. This led me to reflect on the priorities and values that define a Catholic Education Community.

### Priorities and Values that Define a Catholic Education Community

Dr. Leo O' Reilly, in a media article marking the launch of Catholic Schools Week some years ago, posed the simple question: "what does it mean to be a Catholic school?" He pointed out that there was a need for Catholic schools to be more conscious and confident of their own identity and mission while supporting choice for parents so that no child has to attend a school where their family's faith or conscience is compromised. Following the publication of the Bishops' pastoral letter on education, *Vision '08 – a Vision for Catholic education*, all stakeholders in Catholic schools – pupils, teachers, parents, boards of management, trustees and the Church community were invited to share the vision that gives life to a Catholic school. Taking time to identify the priorities and values that define Catholic education remains a worthwhile and, perhaps, challenging exercise, and, I suggest that among the questions that might be asked are:

- What does it mean in practice when we say 'Catholic education is rooted in the life of Jesus Christ and the values of the Gospel'?
- What are the practical day-to-day implications of saying that Catholic education is based on a 'shared understanding of the image of the learner'?
- What are the challenges associated with the following words taken from a school 'Vision Statement': *we emphasise that as a school community that worships and journeys together, we offer a strong sense of caring for one another and being responsible in solidarity for the larger community – neighbourhood, nation, world?*
- What is to be expected of a school that describes itself as having, as a strong priority, *prayer and reflection as an integral part of the day-to-day life of the school?*

- What does it mean, in reality, particularly in relation to policies, practices and procedures, to *have a priority for the poor, for those who suffer because of injustice?*
- "*Education in school 'x' values and respects each student. It seeks to educate all - irrespective of ability, creed, or ethnic, social and economic background - in the inclusive learning environment of a Catholic school*". What evidence might be sought in support of such a claim?
- *Education in school 'x', while maintaining a Catholic ethos, fosters multi-cultural and multi-faith dialogue. Diversity is celebrated. Sincere, honest and respectful dialogue among those of different cultures and faith leads to greater understanding and tolerance...*" What practices reflect this ideal?
- What can parents/guardians and students expect from a Catholic school which undertakes to *enable students to discern, to search for truth and constructively engage in a critical way with the reality and meaning of what happens in their daily lives?*

Michael Paul Gallagher in *Clashing Symbols* quotes the author Douglas Coupland in *Girlfriend in a Coma*: "there must be all these people everywhere on Earth, so desperate for the smallest sign that there is something finer or larger about ourselves than we had supposed. How can I give them a spark?" Gallagher suggests that this is surely the question of every Catholic educator and leader: "How can I give them a spark?" The 'giving' of that spark is not, of course, to be interpreted as 'indoctrination' or disregard for students of other faith or non-faith backgrounds who may have chosen a Catholic school and been welcomed in accordance with the criteria of open and inclusive Admissions Policies. Such policies are found in the vast majority of our Catholic schools throughout the country, even in situations where demand greatly exceeds capacity.

The recommendations of an Irish Human Rights Commission 'consultation on religion and education' report (IHRC, 2011) advise that 'denominational schools which have other faith or non faith children as pupils should take steps to guard against any inadvertent indoctrination or proselytism of those children by teachers'. I suggest that Catholic schools which foster multi-cultural and multi-faith dialogue, with a view to enabling growth in mutual understanding and tolerance, are unlikely to fall into the trap of 'inadvertent indoctrination'.

Some media opinion, while not presenting any substantial evidence in support of such a claim, has tended to criticise Catholic schools for not working towards the development of critical thinking in young people. I believe that there is, on the contrary, significant evidence to show that Catholic educators, while recognising all that is good in contemporary culture, lead students to reflect on and recognise how this culture affects their thinking, imagining and emotions. They seek to bring to the surface and to awaken the natural questions that are part and parcel of the growth of a young person. This process also involves analysing, comparing and contrasting the multiple values by which young people are surrounded and relating them to the deep hungers that they discover for themselves. Such discovery enables the young person to discern the reality and meaning of daily life and experience. The search for truth which gives a Catholic school its identity is not about running away or 'behind the wall' from our political, social, cultural and economic reality but rather about constructively engaging with it in a critical way.

If the values and priorities that define a Catholic school community are so important as determinants of the context in which school leadership is exercised, then some reflection on a spirituality that will sustain school leaders in such a learning environment is surely an important factor for consideration. One definition of spirituality is that used by Fr. Fagin S.J, Loyola Institute of Ministry in New Orleans, of Irish origin and probably related to one of the 'Fagan clans' around the country! He defines spirituality as 'the way we experience God and the way we shape our lives in response'.

### A Spirituality of Leadership

Murphy (2007) has much to say about the spirituality of the Catholic educator and those who take on the leadership of Catholic schools. He describes a visit to a 'Grade 1' classroom to witness the introduction of what was then a new catechetical programme in Toronto. One day when he was away a priest friend of his visited the classroom. Although very committed, this man believed that, unless the children were climbing the walls when he left, the visit was not a success. Next day, Annette, a very precocious six year old, said to the teacher, "that was a very strange priest who was in here. He should go back to the 'cemetery' for a while because he didn't say anything about God while he was in here".

Murphy uses this story to emphasise that, however else the responsibilities of Catholic educators are defined, the legitimate expectation of professional colleagues, students, parents and the Church community is that they say something about God. Countless books, studies and articles confirm Murphy's claim that people are seeking a spiritual vision that will provide some meaning, coherence, rootedness and consistency to the journey of life in these disjointed times.

Silf tells the story of a buffet supper to mark the welcome of a friend's induction as Parish Priest. The parishioners had provided a marvellous feast in the Church hall. The place became alive with conversation and within ten minutes the tables were bare...except for one bowl of a beautiful salad. Silf describes how her heart went out to the person who had spent time preparing it. Why had nobody eaten it? Then it became obvious why the salad was deserted and untouched. There was no spoon! The fact hit her like a sledgehammer. She realised that the salad bowl was telling her something about the Church. It too, can sometimes look like a bowl of salad, full of what people are so hungry for. But where is the spoon? (Silf, 2000)

But what of the spirituality of the Catholic educator, and of those who lead the enterprise of education in a Catholic school? If we reflect on the Irish scene, the spirituality which has informed and inspired Catholic education has been that flowing from the lived experience, the various charisms at the centre of Dioceses and Religious congregations for two centuries. While the inspiration of these charisms continue to underpin the characteristic spirit of our Catholic schools and to motivate those who lead them, it would be incorrect to assume that the spirituality of religious life should also be the spirituality of our lay Catholic educators. Where lies the responsibility then to nurture and support a spirituality arising out of daily life experiences of our educators who as married, family or single people live and lead in the pluralist and global society of 2012?

A contemporary spirituality for the Catholic educator and, more specifically for those in leadership, must, on the one hand, be faithful to the Catholic theological tradition, and, on the other hand, be relevant to the real world in which they find themselves. An incarnational spirituality recognises that every aspect of life reveals the presence of God. Catholic educators experience this incarnational spirituality in so many ways, for example:

*In the sacredness recognised in the mystery of each young person*

*In the wonder of the achievement of learning*

*In the pain of the student who is angry/hurting & in the joy of seeing the healing happen*

*In the hurt of fellow educators*

*In the untidiness of school politics*

*In the deliberations of 'educational partners' & stakeholders*

*In the constraints and frustrations that seem to thwart the vision*

*In the burden of accountability to so many agencies*

*In the burden of expectations of what the school should achieve*

*In the seemingly remote but very influential decisions at Government level*

*In the experience of 'having made a difference'*

George et al (2011) describe how, over 50 years, leadership scholars have conducted more than 1000 studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics, or personality traits of great leaders. Thankfully, none of these studies has produced a clear profile of the ideal leader! Somebody mentioned recently that while 'leadership profiles' are very important, they can, unless carefully crafted, also convey the message that only a flawless person could possibly 'fit the bill'. In another situation, a member of a selection committee for the appointment of school Principal commented that we have reached a point where it would not be surprising to find at the end of an advertisement for school Principal the statement "it would also help if he/she could walk on water"!

An emerging view emanating from research in this area seems to suggest, however, that 'an 'incomplete' leader who is authentic is likely to be more effective (Ancona et al, 2011). In Ancona's research, there is a description of how hundreds of people have struggled under the weight of the myth of the 'complete leader'. George et al describe authentic leaders as those who 'demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently and lead with their hearts as well as their heads...' It is interesting to note how this resonates with the notion of a spirituality that enables the authentic leader to understand the deeper purpose of their leadership.

## The Journey Ahead

Leadership development includes both formal and informal elements and is helped or hindered by the culture of an organisation. There is a danger that the potential of leadership development to build capacity and thus exercise a very influential role into the future may not remain centre-stage because of the urgency of achieving the necessary cuts in our current economic reality. The success of various initiatives to date, however, will hopefully ensure that resource provision will continue to enable appropriate leadership development at all levels. It relates to in-school personnel, potential members of boards of management and people willing to commit to the work of trusts into the future. But it is not all about resources.

*Successful enterprises do not wait for leaders to come along. They actively seek out people, enable them to learn by doing and so develop their potential. With careful selection, nurturing and encouragement to become involved, many people can play important roles in any organisation, thereby learning to say 'we' rather than 'I' as they become more and more fired by the mission of the enterprise (Kotter, 2011).*

The constantly repeated claim that the future effectiveness and authenticity of Catholic education is inexorably linked to its quality of leadership raises major questions for all stakeholders at this moment in the history of Catholic education in Ireland. In discussing faith-based leadership it is important to guard against a separation of professionalism and spirituality. There remains the pressing need to discover a Christian and Catholic spirituality of leadership, the development of which is more than a 'course' or a 'Retreat' experience.

The world of the leader in a Catholic school is also the world of good and difficult students, of Facebook and Twitter, of hassled parents, of over-burdened professional colleagues, of regulation and accountability, of a genuine sense of community, of employment law, of competing rights and expectations, of confusion and uncertainty, of wonder and excitement, of the political processes necessary to achieve one's educational goals. I am reminded of the spirituality espoused by St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, 'finding God in all things'. According to a friend of Ignatius, Jerome Nadal, this spirituality was never intended to remain the preserve of vowed Religious, or of Catholics or other denominations, for that matter (Silf, 2000). 'Self-awareness,' considered to be at the heart of authentic professional leadership, is also at the heart of 'reflection on experience' so central

to Ignatian spirituality. Perhaps herein lies one example of avenues to be explored if future leaders in AMCSS schools are to find energy, enthusiasm and fulfilment springing from the 'well' of an authentic and life-giving spirituality.

*'Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past'*

*Eliot, 1943*

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PAUL MEANY

# Irish Second-Level Catholic Schools – the Future?



Paul Meany has been a teacher at Marian College, Dublin, a Marist voluntary secondary school since 1973 and was appointed Principal there in 1988. He has been a member of Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS) since 2001 and was President of AMCSS/JMB from 2004 to 2006. He is Chairman of the Board of Management in Sion Hill College, Dublin, a Dominican College in the Le Chéile Trust and is Chairman of the Board of Síol, the finance and property company of the Le Chéile Trust since 2010. He has represented Ireland on the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) since 2004 and is a member of the Executive Board since 2009. He is a member of the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) since its formation in 2009.

Back in 1988, just a year after the AMCSS had been formed, I was appointed Principal of Marian College, a Marist Catholic school for boys in Dublin. As one of the early cohort of “lay-Principals”, my focus then was on the immediate “here and now” as I took up the many challenges of my new role.

Now, almost a quarter of a century later, although I am still learning about practical school leadership, my focus has been able to widen beyond the “here” of Marian College to the wider issues in Irish and European Education and beyond the “now” to a consideration of the future of Catholic voluntary schools, like Marian, over the next twenty-five years.

Prediction is a dangerous game, however. The Canadian writer, Robertson Davies, was of the view that the world is full of people whose notion of a satisfactory future is, in fact, a return to an idealised past. I will try to avoid that trap in this article about some future possibilities for the schools. Instead, I am more aligned with Alan Kay who suggests that the best way to predict the future is to invent it!

To help with that “invention”, I intend to look at the current Irish landscape but I also want to make reference to the wider European context in which we find ourselves. When we joined the European Economic Community in 1972, our historical and insular experience meant that many of the countries of the original community were ahead of us in terms of economic and social development. We have been catching up in the intervening period but it is still true, I believe, to suggest that some of the European countries are experiencing things now which we will not experience perhaps for a further decade.

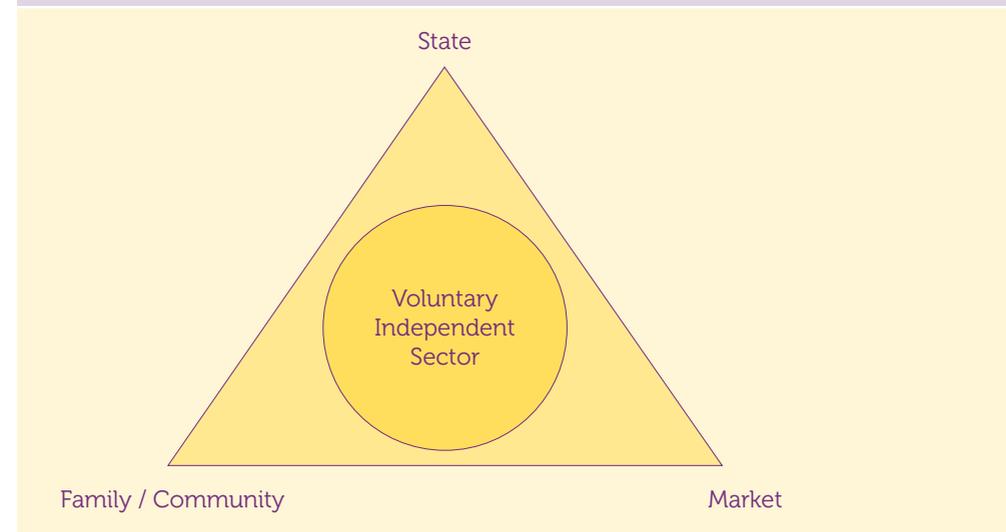
As the Irish representative on the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC), I have been struck again and again over the past decade by how current events in Ireland have already taken place some time ago in the Netherlands. “Tell me the future”, I say to my Dutch colleagues, as I ask them about current developments in the Netherlands.

So it is with a Dutchman that I will begin.

At a 2009 CEEC meeting in the Hague, I expected to hear a pessimistic analysis about the future of Catholic schools. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to hear the voluntary secondary school model being promulgated as a “modern” alternative to state schools or private free-market schools. Indeed, Wim van de Donk, a former advisor to the Dutch government, and an expert on European affairs, believes that the place for voluntary schools is not in the past but very much in the centre

of the public space in the future. He argues that the 1980’s and 1990’s – the early years of the AMCSS – were dominated by “either/or” thinking. In particular, he suggests that polarising concepts like “Left” or “Right” to describe politics or “State” versus “market” to describe economics are outdated and outmoded since they take no account of the needs of particular families, communities, or regions. He suggests that the European Union is currently re-visiting its own understanding of itself to re-incorporate the *community* thinking of the original founders like Adenauer and Monnet. So instead of measuring where we are on some “either/or” linear continuum, he suggests that the image of the partnership triangle is a more potent symbol for the EU now.

Partnership Triangle as symbol for the EU



As you can see, at one vertex is the State, at another vertex is the Market and at the third vertex is the Family (or Community). What are the ideal structures to combine the best of these elements? His answer is the voluntary independent sector! He suggests that vitally important areas like health and education must combine the requirements and standards of the State, must also reflect the needs of the different communities which make up the region, and must of course operate within the financial realities of the Market. (As always there is a time to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s!).

This premise is exemplified in the Netherlands where there has been a long tradition of schools based on a particular denomination (mainly Protestant and Catholic) or based on a particular philosophy of education (for example Montessori, Freinet or Steiner).

To accommodate the needs of parents for the school of their choice, for almost a century now, if a Dutch community has enough parents who want a particular school, then the State builds and funds that school on the same basis as the secular public schools. As a consequence, only about 40% of schools in the Netherlands are State Schools. The majority are voluntary independent state-funded schools which must meet the State's regulatory requirements but which can accommodate the particular philosophical and curricular needs of the community from which they spring.

While the Dutch have developed this particular model (which I believe has much to inform our thinking in today's Ireland), other models for Catholic schools are also found in different countries that are affiliated to the CEEC. These models form a continuum from totally private schools (with the danger of exclusiveness) to state maintained and state owned Catholic schools.

Private independent Catholic voluntary schools are found in those post-Communist states which have not yet moved to state funding of Catholic education, and also as exclusive fee-paying schools in some Western European countries (for example in France and Italy) and in countries with tiny Catholic populations (e.g. Norway with 4 Catholic schools serving a Catholic population that makes up less than 1% of the Norwegian population).

Partial state funding of Catholic schools (at a rate of less than 100% of the state schools) is found in many European countries e.g. Ireland, Belgium, Poland, Denmark (75%) and Luxembourg (60%). This funding can be affected by the economic climate (e.g. drop of 30% in state funding in Portugal in 2010 and current cutbacks in Ireland) and can also be affected by the willingness of people to pay local taxes (for example, Germany, Austria and Spain).

Some countries have a state maintained system where despite differences in the original capital funding, Catholic schools receive the same current funding as state schools (e.g. England and Wales), while finally there are two countries where the state builds and owns the schools and the Catholic schools receive the same funding as state or other schools. These are the Netherlands (as described above) and Scotland.

In 1918 the Catholic Church in Scotland gave all of its schools to the state with the proviso that the state would give legal protection for the Catholicity of the schools. This has been a remarkably successful approach and on a recent visit to Glasgow, the CEEC saw a wonderful new Catholic school, owned and financed by the Local Education Authority, with its central oratory giving public witness to the Catholic nature of the school, while the Catholic Education Service in Scotland is a byword for excellence and innovation within the CEEC.

While these different models may vary from country to country, or region to region, underpinning all the models in the countries of the European Union are two fundamental principles. Firstly, *the individual freedom of parents to choose the school they want for their children*, and secondly, *the collective right to form and run independent schools of a particular denomination*. The basis of these principles can be found in the European Convention of Human Rights and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

In addition, although education continues to be a matter for each member state, the European Court has been ruling that it is not enough for parents to have the right to form such schools but that the state has a responsibility to provide funding to enable the right to be properly exercised.

Meanwhile, here in Ireland, Article 42 of the Constitution notes that parents shall be free to provide education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State and the State shall not oblige parents to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.

Thus, at this time when people doubt the future for the Church and for its Catholic schools, it is important to remember that there is a fully supported legal and philosophical basis for the existence of state-funded denominational education throughout the EU.

It was heartening, therefore, to hear the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny, reaffirm to the 2012 Conference of the Le Chéile Trust (which represents 14 congregations and over 50 second level Catholic schools) that under his leadership, his government will continue to ensure that parents will continue to have the right to send their children to denominational schools which will continue to be supported by the State, and that such parental choice must be maintained into the future.

However, as everyone is aware, the winds of secularisation are also blowing throughout the continent and the questioning of the place of Religion in the Public Space has been gathering pace.

In the light of the dramatic decline in the power and influence of Institutional Churches around the European Union, some people talk of a post-Christian Europe where Enlightenment ideas and ideals are in a final “mop up” battle with the superstitious remnants of the pre-Scientific age. The growth of significant Islamic communities in many countries may be accelerating the ascendancy of the “anti-religion” world-view since the spectre of Sharia Law replacing EU law is being given succour by recent developments in the so called “Arab Spring” in Egypt and other middle-Eastern countries. Whatever the causes, there is no doubt that calls for the separation of Church and State – already the norm for over a century in “Catholic” France - are now reaching a crescendo and have become mainstream thinking for sections of the Labour element of the current Coalition government here in Ireland.

This raises the question of how to characterise the current state second-level schools in the Republic of Ireland. I speak of course about the position of Community Schools and Community Colleges. The 1970’s Community and Comprehensive School experiment in Ireland had a number of objectives. One of those was the provision of larger co-educational schools in new premises that would replace older single-sex voluntary schools by the amalgamation of these older schools. This meant that many of these new schools emerged as *de facto* Catholic Community schools or *de facto* Protestant Comprehensive schools which reflected the history and ethos of the predecessor schools, and which ensured the continuation of that ethos by a new Trustee partnership between the founding religious community and the State (through the presence of the VEC).

Meanwhile, the original state vocational schools broadened their curriculum as a response to the needs of parents and of the state. Over the past twenty-five years, many of these schools have evolved into Community Colleges which, although clearly state schools, have had various levels of affiliation with the Catholic Church.

My thesis in this article is that there is a future for Catholic voluntary schools. But what about these *de facto* Catholic Community Schools and *de facto* Catholic Community Colleges? In the light of recent rulings of the European Court, I expect that individual EU States will be asked to make a distinction between *secular* state schools and *denominational* state (or state-funded) schools. Thus, the creative

ambivalence of the 1970’s model (of church involvement in state schools) may no longer be acceptable for parents who are seeking secular education for their children. The Community Colleges in particular – and perhaps also the Community and Comprehensive schools – may therefore come under pressure to break the link with any particular Church.

In the case of the Comprehensive schools, the link is with the Protestant churches. In the case of Community schools, the link is generally with the Catholic Church. Some schools may now wish to break that link. Others, who emerged as *de facto* Catholic schools resulting from the merger of two former voluntary schools, may wish to strengthen that link and declare themselves as Catholic State schools. Will this be possible?

Already a number of Community schools (with congregational Trustees that belong to the Le Chéile Trust) have been accepted by the Le Chéile Trust. What are the implications of this for Trusts (like Le Chéile) and for the State?

If Community Schools can be declared Catholic State schools, should such Community Schools be still included in the list of Catholic schools?

The answers may ultimately depend on the European Court. Although it acknowledges that education (under the various European treaties) is still a matter for each individual member state, it has begun to ask individual states to explain certain practices. For example, in Italy where over 90% of the population is Catholic, only 4% of the schools are private Catholic schools. The rest are *de facto* Catholic State schools. Now a Muslim mother has asked that the crucifix be removed from her local State school. The Court appears to have accepted the argument that State schools should be secular but cannot force the Italian government to act. Instead, it has passed the issue back to Italy so that the Italian government can justify its position. Since it is unlikely that the Italian government will be able to justify maintaining crucifixes in secular classrooms, it will most likely have to change the law and forbid the presence of such symbols in state schools. This is of course already the situation in France and the United States of America. How long will it be until someone takes a similar case here in Ireland in respect of State schools? Will such a case force the education community to consider whether the compromise reached at the end of the twentieth century can be maintained into the twenty-first century?

Whatever the answers for the state schools, it is time now to return to a consideration of the future of the voluntary Catholic schools. As we have seen, in Europe Catholic schools are mainly private schools under public law, with a continuum from totally independent private schools to State maintained Catholic schools. Here in Ireland, the number of voluntary secondary schools has declined significantly over the lifetime of the AMCSS from 493 schools to 357 today. Some of the decline has been due to the aforementioned amalgamations (mainly outside of the larger towns and cities) while some has also been due to competition (and consequent closures) mainly in urban areas. Will this trend continue over the next fifteen years?

To answer this question, I suggest that we have to divide the AMCSS schools into a number of categories. These categories form a continuum from stand-alone schools in rural areas to competing schools in urban settings. Each of these categories may experience different futures. Let us take them one by one.

### Stand-alone Schools

This is the scenario where the school is the only school in the area. In looking at the map of the Republic, I estimate that there are 176 such schools (24% of total) consisting of 44 Voluntary schools (mainly in Munster and Connaught), 47 Community Schools and 85 Community Colleges/VEC schools.

Such stand-alone schools are effectively schools for the whole community. If Catholic, then the school must meet the needs of not just the Catholic population in the community but must also welcome people of other faiths and none since there is no alternative school in the area. It appears to me that such schools (unless very small) should survive as schools for the community but if Catholic there is a danger that they will either water-down their Catholicism (in order to acknowledge the people of other faiths and none) or move into the state sector as multidominational Community Schools or Community Colleges.

On the other side of the coin, if VEC State schools are obliged by law to become more secular, what will be the situation of the Catholic population in an area where the stand-alone school happens to be a VEC Community College?

### Catholic Pair

There are only 5 pairs of such Catholic schools in the Republic. It would appear that such schools might be ripe for amalgamation or some other rationalisation if

they are not both thriving. However, over the past twenty years, very few, if any, of the amalgamations of two voluntary schools has resulted in a new amalgamated voluntary school. The willingness of the new Trusts to bid for Catholic schools may assist this process in the future but this will require new thinking on behalf of these new Trusts. Indeed, the fact that one of the pair may be in one Trust and the other in a second Trust, is an argument for some that Ireland is too small to have several Trusts and that the Catholic school sector should unite under a single patron body which will be able to plan for the future provision of Catholic schools.

### Diverse Pair

There are 32 instances where there is a Catholic school in the same area as a Community School or VEC school. In a sense, this is the sort of diversity being sought by the Minister for Education, Mr Ruairi Quinn, in his remarks to the forum on patronage at primary level. In recent years, however, "rationalisation" in these circumstances has generally resulted in the loss of the voluntary school and the creation of either a Community School or Community College. In order to flourish into the future, it would appear that such schools must re-emphasise their Catholic identity. If they do not, what will differentiate such schools from the state sector?

### Pair or Triplet of Catholic Schools with one VEC School

This is a more complex scenario and again needs careful consideration to see what the best outcome should be. Using government policy regarding diversity, it would seem that amalgamation with the VEC should not be the option. However, factors such as the financial and curricular viability of small schools (be they voluntary or state schools) must also be taken into consideration. In this regard, new proposed amendments to the school transport system must be carefully examined to ensure that protection of "ethos" can include a majority ethos as well as any minority ethos which needs to be considered.

### Five or More Schools

This is the situation in the larger towns and the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford and Kilkenny. As already outlined, market competition rather than strategic partnership seems to be current model. In addition, while the many amalgamations have resulted in many new co-educational schools, most of the city schools are retaining their traditional single-sex model.

The figures for these six categories are outlined in the following table:

Catholic schools	Stand-alone	Catholic Pair	Diverse Pair	2 or 3 v 1 VEC	5 or more	TOTAL Catholic	TOTAL Schools	% Catholic
Munster	16	6	10	41	43	116	213	54%
Connacht	17	2	7	11	14	51	102	50%
Ulster	1	0	3	4	4	12	49	24%
Leinster (excl. Dubl)	10	2	12	28	29	81	177	46%
Dublin	0	0	0	0	97	97	183	53%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>49%</b>

These figures are interesting in many ways and they show, I believe, that there will be a number of “futures” for voluntary Catholic schools which are now moving from a majority to a minority in many areas of the country.

Now that the Catholic Schools Partnership (which provides a single voice for everyone involved in Catholic education in the Republic) is up and running, it will be important that it quickly provides strategic leadership so that the relevant Catholic Trusts and Congregations can build the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) into a cohesive force where the sorts of decisions taken by our Protestant colleagues in the past can now be taken by the Catholic providers so that a network of Catholic schools can be maintained for those parents who want their children to be educated in Catholic schools.

In this regard, the VECs have correctly spent the last ten years working on a strategy for the future. The VECs will undergo a major change in the next few months when they morph into the smaller number of new local Education Training Boards but they have still positioned themselves well to deal with the expected changes that lie ahead.

The formation of the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP), the formation of Trusts like ERST, Le Chéile, and CEIST (following an almost immeasurable contribution by the congregations over the past one hundred and fifty years), the alliance of the Bishops, Congregations and Trusts in the ATCS are all positive signs that the Catholic community will find the courage and the will not alone to maintain the remaining stock of Catholic schools but also to be pro-active in planning for the

future provision of Catholic schools and for the provision of Catholic education within Community Schools and Colleges.

However, there are a lot of questions regarding the new Trusts. How many will survive and for how long? How can they co-ordinate their activities and ensure that they co-operate in the provision of schools? How can they avoid duplication of each other’s work and that of effective bodies such as the AMCSS?

Indeed in the context of the developments in Europe, should we be concentrating on the “Catholic brand” or should we be going one stage further and co-operating more fully with the other Christian churches?

While the Trusts are of the view that the State should contribute towards their operation (in the way that VECs receive money for their patron function), the absence of funding means that running these Trusts is currently using up the seed capital provided by the founding Congregations. In addition, the Trusts are discovering that school property is more frequently a liability than an asset.

The fourteen new schools which have been announced by Minister Quinn will be built by the State and leased to whatever patron is successful in the process of local consultation which is currently being undertaken. Le Chéile, for example, as discussed in the next chapter, has applied to provide a school in Mulhuddart in Dublin 15. If it is successful, then a Catholic school owned by the State but leased by a Catholic patron will be able to ensure that the Catholic ethos of the Le Chéile Charter can be implemented in Mulhuddart into the future.

This discussion of the Trusts suggests to me that mission and enterprise are more important than who actually owns and funds the property. Indeed, since 90% of our Catholic schools are already (almost totally) dependent on State funding, should the Catholic sector not pay closer attention to the European examples of fully maintained schools and consider the issue of state ownership of legally protected Catholic school enterprises? The examples of the Netherlands and Scotland show what is possible.

Indeed, within the general policy framework for the EU, it appears to me that there are also many reasons for the state to consider such a course which could fit well with the underlying philosophy behind the Education Training Board concept and which could create a “win-win” situation both for the state and for the faith schools in the voluntary sector.

The choices that are made by the leaders of Catholic Education over the next twelve months will be critical in deciding whether we can influence and invent the future in a pro-active fashion or whether we will end up reacting to the policies and decisions of others.

The stand-alone schools – whether voluntary schools, Community schools or Community Colleges – have to analyse how well they are meeting the needs of the communities which they serve.

The diversity issue will continue to be debated as we consider the status of those Community Schools that are *de facto* Catholic. These schools, together with the new schools about to be distributed to different patrons, may give us new models of State Catholic schools. This in turn may influence the thinking of the Trusts with regard to the long-term future of their schools.

Meanwhile, the schools in the larger urban areas appear to have a myriad of options. For example, here are some of the options for my own school in the south inner-city of Dublin. If not sold or closed, the school may be

#### State funded

- Still under the direct trust of the Marist Brothers (NW Europe province or Rome?)
- In a Trust like Le Chéile
- In some sort of Trust under the Archdiocese of Dublin (which is a common scenario for congregational schools in Europe)
- In a single Catholic Trust under the Catholic Schools Partnership in Maynooth

#### State maintained

- A voluntary Catholic school maintained by the Local Education Training Board (LETB)

#### State school

- A Catholic state school which is owned and maintained by the LETB
- A multid denominational or non-denominational school owned and maintained by the LETB
- A secular state school owned and maintained by the LETB

#### Private school

- Out of the state system and charging fees as an independent private school

I don't know what options will be chosen by the CSP, by the Trusts or by individual schools. However, given all that I have seen and learned over the past twenty-five years of the AMCSS, I believe that we can have a strong voluntary independent Catholic school sector in the public space if

- *Parents continue to choose and support our schools.* They will do so in my view if the school is both a Good school and a Catholic school. It must be both! Schools must also invest time and money to link with the Catholic community/parish/diocese (of which it will play an ever more significant part) if the intentions of the ten year plan outlined in the National Directory for Catechesis are to be fulfilled.
- *We are clear about our Catholic identity and values.* As followers of Christ, with a Catholic understanding of education, our schools must be Christian communities where each school is an agent of personal growth and transformation and where Religious Education is an integral part of the life of the school.
- *We have a clear strategy about the provision of Catholic schools and about our relationship with the State.* The work of the CSP (of which the AMCSS is an active member) will be vital in this regard. Time is of the essence here! We have already seen significant erosion in the number of our schools over the lifetime of the AMCSS so it will be vital that this strategy is articulated and implemented as soon as possible.
- *We are prepared to commit resources to the identification of leaders and the spiritual formation of our Chairpersons, Principals and teachers.* While the focus of the CSP and the Trusts is on the future, the focus of each school Board and its staff must remain on the reality of the day-to-day witness to the message of Christ in action. This will not be possible without the spiritual formation of our leaders and leaders-to-be.

The AMCSS has been a huge influence for good since its foundation 25 years ago and I hope that it will continue to thrive under the guidance of the next generation of school leaders who will be vital players in inventing the future for Catholic education in Ireland.

# Catholic Education – Reflections on Current Policy for Opening New Schools

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Prior to joining Le Chéile she worked as Assistant National Coordinator on the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) team. She has been Deputy Chairperson of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) from 2006 to 2012 and was awarded a Doctorate in Education from NUI Maynooth in 2010.



## Introduction

Participation in second level education in Ireland increased dramatically after the introduction of free second level education in 1967 with the number of students sitting the Leaving Certificate examination rising to 60,000 in 1991 compared with less than 10,000 in 1963 (Hyland and Milne 1992).<sup>53</sup> In 1990 there were 808 second level schools catering for a total of 339,132 students. Twenty years later, in 2010, in spite of an increase of over 11,500 students the number of schools reduced by 78 to 730 (AMCSS Annual Report 2011). The greatest reduction occurred in the number of Voluntary Secondary Catholic schools, reducing from 493 in 1989/90 to 384 in 2009/10: 109 schools fewer. Since 1992 no new permanent voluntary secondary schools have been set up under the patronage of religious congregations.

There are many factors contributing to these changes, including economies of scale favouring larger schools, changing social contexts, the decline in membership of Religious congregations and the funding arrangements for different school types. Nevertheless, those of us involved in Catholic education would not like to see this trend continue. A number of Religious Congregations have recognised that they themselves will not be in a position to continue into the future as trustees of schools and therefore have formed new Trust Bodies in recent years. Le Chéile Schools Trust is one such body, set up initially by twelve Congregations to

- Affirm their commitment to the future of Catholic Education
- Provide for the needs of the students and communities in their schools
- Honour their partnership with the government in the education system<sup>54</sup>

The Le Chéile Education Office was set up in September 2009 and in 2011 when the Department of Education and Skills (DES) announced the proposal to open new schools, Le Chéile decided to apply to become the patron<sup>55</sup> of one of these schools. This article is a reflection on that process and the issues arising from the procedures to be followed in submitting an application. It is a work-in-progress as the closing date for submissions has not yet been reached at the time of writing.

The DES Press Release on 27th June 2011 announced that 40 new schools (20 primary and 20 post primary) are to be established in the next six years to cater for a projected increase of over 45,000 primary pupils and almost 25,000 post-primary pupils by the start of the 2017/18 school year. The press release also announced that new arrangements would be put in place for the recognition of new schools.

<sup>53</sup> Hyland A., and Milne K., Irish Educational Documents Vol. II. CICE 1992 p264

<sup>55</sup> For the purposes of this article the words patron and trustee are used interchangeably

<sup>54</sup> Le Chéile Charter available on [www.lecheiletrust.ie](http://www.lecheiletrust.ie)

They invited patrons to submit applications, following the procedures and criteria which they set out (DES June 2011).<sup>56</sup> While this presents challenges to Catholic patrons it also presents an opportunity to establish new Catholic schools for the twenty-first century.

The Irish Constitution, along with international covenants and conventions, asserts the individual freedom of parents to choose the school they want for their children and the collective right to form and run independent schools of a particular denomination (CEEC 2009).<sup>57</sup> Both of these issues are particularly relevant in the context of DES policy on education provision and have a particular significance for patrons. The DES procedures reflect these principles in that they respect the right of a Catholic patron to open new schools while also placing a strong emphasis on parental demand for such schools. It honours the principle set out in the White Paper (Govt of Ireland 1995 p.4) 'within a national framework, individual schools, colleges and partners in education are entitled and empowered to nurture and promote their particular values, traditions and character, and to set out their philosophical approaches'.

### Criteria & Procedures

Under the new arrangements the main criteria for the decision on patronage in an area where there is already at least one second level school will be whether the establishment of the proposed school model would result in greater diversity and plurality of second level school patronage... where there is a demand for such diversity and plurality. Patron bodies proposing schools are asked to provide evidence of parental demand by signing up lists of parents who indicate interest in having their children educated in their new school. The document further states that individual patron bodies from the one faith group will be regarded as representing the same school patronage type for assessing plurality.

A number of other criteria are set out, including a willingness on the part of the patron to accept and open special education facilities, acceptance of the rules and regulations laid down by the DES, a willingness to share school buildings with other schools, enrol children in the area designated for the new school, operate within the resourcing and policy parameters established by the DES, provide the prescribed curriculum, be willing to expand or operate in the size range of 800 to 1,000 pupils and be willing to establish an Aonad (an Irish-medium section of

the school) where there is demand for it. There is no evidence that any of these criteria would be problematic for any patron in the current context.

One of the positive features of the new arrangements is that the successful patron will have the option of providing their own site for the new school or entering into a lease agreement with the DES. Currently, the vast majority of Voluntary Secondary Catholic schools are owned by a Diocese, Religious Congregation or Trust Body. Into the future, for Catholic patron bodies with very limited resources, it is reassuring that a lease agreement is an option as it provides the opportunity to be the patron of the "enterprise of education" without the necessity to provide the land and buildings. It is an opportunity to be a partner in the State education system, offering a second level school with a Catholic ethos as one of the options available to parents.

### Diversity & Pluralism

The Education Act (1998), as part of its objective, states that it aims

*... to ensure that the education system is accountable to students, their parents and the state for the education provided, respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the state.*

What is of note here is that diversity is defined in terms of values, beliefs, languages and traditions. In the current discourse, there appears to be a one-dimensional interpretation of diversity, i.e. religious diversity. In the White Paper *Charting our Education Future* (1995), one of the principles underpinning the education system was *Pluralism*. In that context pluralism was described not only as difference of culture, traditions and beliefs but also as the capacity for development within each individual human being. It recognised that 'the State should serve the educational rights of its citizens to participate in and benefit from education... within a framework which entitles individual schools and colleges to promote their philosophical values'. (p.6)

For a Catholic patron body wishing to apply for a new school as described above, diversity of patronage can simply be met by applying in an area where there are no other Catholic schools. Catholic patron bodies will play their part in providing diversity of patronage by the very act of applying for a new school. The Le Chéile

154 | <sup>56</sup> Statement issued to patrons of second level along with the letter inviting applications for patronage – June 2011

<sup>57</sup> Address by Ms Beatrijs Pletinck to CEEC on 6th March 2009)

Trust chose to apply for patronage of a new school in Mulhuddart Dublin 15, as there are no Catholic second level schools in that area. There are five primary schools designated by the DES to be served by the proposed new second level school here. Four of these are Catholic primary schools serving the parishes of Corduff and Mulhuddart and the fifth is an Educate Together primary school. The nearest Catholic secondary schools are in Cabra (10km), Kilcock (33km) or Trim (38km).

As part of the application process, and in identifying parental demand, each patron must identify their particular type of school and show how it differs from schools of other patrons. That requires us to articulate clearly what we value and what we offer. Traditionally in Ireland we did not have to do this as Catholic education was such an integral part of society. In recent years, however, the social and religious context has changed and the reputation of the Catholic Church has been sullied by scandals of child abuse and the way these were handled. This should not blind us to the good that was done for Irish education by the Church but it does mean that we need to present a new look for Catholic education for the future.

The publication of *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools*<sup>58</sup> has been a very welcome resource for schools, which continue to adjust to the changing external community and environment of the 21st century. We cannot assume that members of the public are aware of these changes within schools; therefore it is necessary to clarify that Catholic schools are places of inclusion, as described in the Guidelines

*Due to the universal, non-discriminatory nature of Catholicism and the value it places on ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, Catholic schools are open to the admission of pupils of all faiths and none.*<sup>59</sup>

These Guidelines, however, caution that before we can comfortably host students from other faiths and their needs, it seems necessary to address our own identity as Catholic schools. *Vision 08* (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference 2008 p.8) also supports diversity and inclusion stating that in our increasingly multi-cultural society, Catholic education values tolerance and inclusiveness, and sees the presence of children from other denominations as an enrichment of the educational experience and an opportunity for deeper understanding among people holding diverse convictions. Similarly, the Catholic Schools Partnership in its recent publication supports these principles.

*Catholic schools emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good, where knowledge is sought and respected while faith is nurtured and challenged. (Catholic Schools Partnership 2010)*

Therefore, in Catholic schools diversity is provided within the school by welcoming students of a variety of cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Catholic schools of the 21st century have to take account of the changing social demographic that has developed in Ireland over the last twenty-five years or so. No longer can we restrict our education to a select group of students from a homogeneous background.

*“Catholic schools aspire to create an open, happy, stimulating and mutually respectful community environment” (Vision 08).*

In the Le Chéile bid for the new school in Mulhuddart, one of the first actions taken was to design a brief information leaflet outlining the key values that underpin our educational philosophy, bearing in mind that the leaflet would be distributed to families many of whose first language was not English. The leaflet was based on the Le Chéile educational vision as outlined in the Charter and included the information below.

#### Our New School will Offer

- **Academic Excellence**  
*We will pursue the highest academic standards and offer a wide range of subjects with the most up-to-date information technology*
- **Pastoral Care**  
*We will create an environment that is caring and compassionate, where each child is known and appreciated as an individual*
- **Sport, Music, Drama & Social Justice**  
*We will create well rounded young people who are exposed to a wide range of extra-curricular activities to develop their talents and interests.*

<sup>58</sup> Mullally, A.: Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools. 2010. P.6 Commissioned and printed by Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools / Joint Managerial Body

<sup>59</sup> Ibid p.6

- **Spirituality**

*We will assist students in developing a sense of their own worth and becoming aware of the spiritual dimension of life. Students will learn respect for other faiths and points of view in a Christian context.*

- **Community**

*We will develop a sense of belonging where the young people can flourish and grow in a caring community.*

Our next task was to distribute it and engage in dialogue with parents in the area. Recognising that we belong to a Catholic community our first visit was to the priests of the parish who then introduced us to the principals of the Catholic primary schools. Through their infectious enthusiasm and belief in the benefits of Catholic education we were invited to meet parents through a number of different school and parish activities.

### Parental Choice

Parental demand or choice is a key principle underpinning provision of education not only in Ireland but internationally. This principle is strongly supported by the DES, the Irish Bishops and, indeed the Le Chéile Schools Trust. The challenge, however, remains in supporting parents in making choices. Recent research has shown that parents choose schools based on a variety of factors, often placing quality of education and geographical location ahead of patronage or religion.<sup>60</sup> More important to them are such qualities as safety and care, discipline and academic achievement. These are qualities traditionally provided by Catholic schools which we would be keen to maintain into the 21st century. The parents whom we met in Mulhuddart clearly appreciated these values, which they agreed were the hallmark of the primary schools their children currently attended. They were keen to listen to what was being offered to them by way of a new second level school.

As part of our engagement with parents and the local community we held a public meeting in Mulhuddart. It was significant that although there was some vociferous opposition to the traditional face of the church, this was far outweighed by the strong support for the Catholic values and traditions in education.

There is general acceptance that Irish society has become more diverse in recent years, particularly with the increased immigration during the Celtic Tiger years of the 1990s. In the Mulhuddart area, over 50% of the population are people whose ethnic origin is not Irish. One of the interesting features of our meetings with them was that talk of different school types and historical traditions did not hold the same associations for them as for many indigenous Irish people. Alongside the change in ethnic origin, there has also been a change in the habits and practices of the general population particularly in relation to religious practices. However, it is interesting to note that in the 2006 census almost 87% of the population classified themselves as Catholics (see Table 1 to the right). Results on religious classifications from the 2011 census are not yet available.

Census 2006 <sup>61</sup> Classification by Religious Beliefs

Religion	Number	%
Catholic	3,681,426	86.8%
Protestant <small>incl. Church of Ireland, Presbyterian &amp; Methodist</small>	161,291	3.8%
"Other Stated Religions" <small>incl. Jewish</small>	140,471	3.3%
No Religion	186,318	4.4%
Didn't State	70,322	1.7%
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>4,239,828</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 1

In spite of media attention which might suggest a significant desire to separate religion from education, these statistics and our experience in Mulhuddart to date does not reflect that view. What is important, however, is that a Catholic school embraces and welcomes diversity within the school, that it enrolls the children of the community who wish to attend, whether they are Catholic or not. It is also important that other forms of diversity, such as cultural or ethnic diversity are recognised and that any new school genuinely reflects and serves the community in which it is located.

## Co-patronage

Since the 1970s the greatest growth in post primary schools has been in the Community and Comprehensive sector. The number of schools has increased from 63 to 92, now comprising 13% of second level schools by comparison with 8% in 1990. Catholic patrons are currently involved as co-patrons of around 70 Community Schools, for the most part with the local Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It is significant that, although Community Schools are generally considered to be multi-denominational, the Deed of Trust<sup>62</sup> provides for a State-funded position of Chaplain and the provision of two hours per week of religious instruction provided by suitably qualified personnel. A question to be addressed by Catholic patrons is whether this model fulfils our mission to provide Catholic education.

In some cases Community Schools resulted from amalgamations but in many other cases, new Community Schools were formed by religious and VECs working together as co-patrons. However, that co-patronage model is not now permitted. Under the new DES arrangements<sup>63</sup> if a VEC and a Catholic patron body wish to apply together as co-patrons for a new school, the resulting model must be designated a Community College. This type of college is a partnership arrangement that allows Catholic representation on the Board of Management, but they are not co-patrons as in the Community School model.

Thus it appears that not all patron bodies are being treated equally. For example, Educate Together and An Foras Patrúnachta are recognised as national patron bodies whereas the DES requires Catholic patrons to form one single entity before they can be recognised as a national patron body. By comparison, there is no requirement for the VECs to form one national patron body. This means that if the VEC enters into partnership with Educate Together or An Foras Patrúnachta the resulting school model may be a community school but this would not apply to a Catholic patron. The current restructuring of the 33 VECs into 16 Education and Training Boards could provide an opportunity to create one national VEC patron body, and thus meet the same requirements as all other patron bodies. It seems to me that we need greater clarification on the criteria for recognition of patrons under Section 8 of the Education Act.

For Catholic patrons, forming a single patron body for Community Schools is a serious challenge. The Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) have addressed this issue in different ways. The ATCS in its current format was set up in September 2009 to address the concerns of Trustees/Patrons and to promote best operational practice in the exercise of Trusteeship/Patronage of schools on behalf of the Catholic Church.<sup>64</sup> While this organisation seeks to develop a common voice response on issues related to Trusteeship/Patronage it is not a patron body. Likewise, the ACCS is not a patron body. It has, however, formed a National Trustee Forum of Patrons of Community Schools which meets annually to discuss issues relating to the exercise of patronage/trusteeship of Community Schools. The challenge remains however, as to how the DES requirement for a single patron entity could or should be met by the Catholic patrons. Unless these issues are resolved Catholic patrons cannot be involved in any new "green-field" Community Schools. Further discussion between the DES and Trust Bodies on these issues would be welcome.

## Further Observations

The new arrangements allow for Catholic voluntary secondary schools to be set up on sites owned by the State and leased to the patron/trustees. If Catholic patrons are successful in their bid to open new schools, then a start-up grant for patrons and the question of equalisation of funding will need to be addressed. Currently, schools under the patronage of VECs receive State grants on average €200 higher per student than voluntary secondary schools.

Once a patron body submits its application to the DES it will be processed by departmental officials to ensure that it meets the criteria. The submission and an accompanying report will be given to the Establishment Group.<sup>65</sup> They will be charged with the responsibility of applying the criteria and making recommendations to the Minister who will have the final say. A question remains, however. When the decision is made, will we know why we were successful or otherwise? There is no marking framework and no appeal mechanism. If our application is not successful how will we know if it is as a result of insufficient preparation, insufficient evidence of parental demand, interpretations of diversity, or other factors?

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding the unknowns, the prospect of opening a new Le Chéile Catholic secondary school in 2014 is an exciting one, although not without its challenges! By the time of publication, the results of this competitive process will be public knowledge. Whatever the outcome, we have learned a number of valuable lessons from the process which we share with you in the hope that by so doing it will encourage others to continue in the process of providing Catholic education in a sustainable manner into the future. The new Catholic schools will not necessarily be the same as those of the last century but we hope they will be characterised by the same spirit of openness and inclusion and that they will be places of welcome to all who live in the community which they serve, providing a safe and happy environment where students can learn to be lifelong learners capable of deep and critical reflection on their own sense of being and on that of the world around them.

Hopefully we will all learn from the process and come up with some revisions of the current procedures so that the emphasis on competition between patrons, parents and primary schools is reduced and a greater spirit of co-operation will prevail. A public debate, similar to that held in the 1990s, may well be necessary again to redefine national education policy. I wonder would the outcome have been different if each patron body applying in an area had to work together, instead of separately, to analyse community needs and discuss the best options in a co-operative manner. Future national policy might do more to encourage patron bodies to work together on an equal footing.

The research has shown that parents place the quality of care and educational achievement higher than the type of patronage. Having said that, one of the positive outcomes has been that as Catholic patrons offering our service in a new area in difficult times, we have received a level of support beyond our expectations. Given the opportunity to have discussions with parents and to articulate our vision for a new Catholic school of the 21st century, we were not found wanting. Traditionally, we did not have to articulate our educational vision; it was taken for granted that voluntary secondary Catholic schools were for any children who wanted academic standards. But those days are long gone. We need to have more discussions with parents about what a Catholic school means, we need to reassure them that we do not proselytise or indoctrinate, we need to listen more to their views and act on the outcomes of this dialogue so that we can provide dynamic centres of learning for all students with our standards and

practices emanating from Catholic values. These values provide an excellent basis for schooling – what parent does not want to know that his/her child will always be respected because we believe they are children of God? What parent would object to a broad range of opportunities for development and fun for their child because:

*...we believe that “the glory of God is humanity fully alive”.*

*The child or parent does not have to be Catholic themselves to benefit from Catholic values. The invitation will always be there to develop the faith aspect of their lives, but it will be an invitation, no more, no less.*

# Meanwhile, on a Lighter Note...

Pádraig Ó Fainín is from Waterford where he went to Mount Sion C.B.S. "from Low Babies to Leaving Cert". Left St. Pat's in Drumcondra in 1977 and has been hiding out in St. Joseph's C.B.S. Primary School, Fairview ever since where he has been Principal for the last 15 years (proof that you can fool loads of people loads of the time!).

When not in Joey's, "Fanno", as he is better known, can be found on the green fields of Ireland coaching hurling and camogie teams or in the not-so-green fields of Kabwe, Zambia working as a volunteer with the charity ZAMDA.

So somebody thought it would be a good idea to ask me to write something about "Catholic Education"! Not a great idea - I'm a school principal so, the cynics would say, I know little enough about education and as for the Catholic bit, this publication is chock full of articles by much more knowledgeable and worthy writers than me! Instead of a long, serious essay I think I'll just throw out a few random thoughts that spring to mind on looking back on thirty-five years at the chalkface of Catholic education.

Where to begin? Let's start in 1977 when as a fresh-faced, young, long-haired N.Q.T (though that acronym hadn't been invented then), I landed, surely through some divine intervention, in St. Joseph's Christian Brothers School.

Life was different then - no induction course, no words of advice apart from the Principal throwing a 'leather' at me saying "Use that if you have to"! Times have surely changed.

Some incidents vaguely connected to Catholic Education stand out:

Take, for instance, the Principal coming into the class telling me and the lads that we'd be having a visit from an Indian Christian Brother and that it would be nice if we made him welcome, made a few cards for him or even got a present for him. What the poor Indian brother made of it when he came in and one of the lads presented him with a bow-and-arrow we'll never know! "Well, you did say he was an Indian, Sir". Lesson learned for the rest of the career - be much more concise in the use of the English language. Mind you the Brother was a big hit because he was barefoot - the lads were fascinated and thrilled when he put his feet up on the table and let them stick pins in his leather-like soles!

Ah, there's an even better story revolving around the retirement of a venerable old teacher, now long gone to his well-earned eternal reward. This teacher was a very holy man, a walking saint, loved by every pupil in the school. Talk came round to his impending retirement and the boys in the class off their own bat hit on the idea of getting him a pressie, and knowing the man involved they decided they'd get him 'a holy present' which I thought very noble and mature of them. Those thoughts lasted until the Parish Priest arrived at my door to report the theft of a statue from one of the side altars in the church. Apparently, some boys in blue uniforms had become the talk of the parish with their fervent praying after school, drawing the admiration of clergy and laity alike. When the boys left, however, it was noticed that a statue went with them. This brought the notion of moving statues to a new level altogether. Needless to say the poor retiring teacher didn't get his holy present.

That reminds me of another, similar episode - the Great May Altar Affair. The N.Q.T., anxious to make an impression on the Brothers, constructed the most fantastic May Altar ever seen; never mind the Great Wall of China, this altar could be seen from the moon. All that was missing were flowers to finish it off so an appeal was issued for the boys to bring in flowers for the altar. There may have been a promise of no homework for any boy helping out with the flowers but, whatever the reason, the next morning saw the most wonderful array of blooms and blossoms. Br. O'Shea was thrilled; the altar looked like an exhibit from the Chelsea Flower Show; pats on the back all round, photos taken, no homework for the boys and shovel loads of brownie points for the múinteoir. All the euphoria disappeared into thin air with the arrival of a fuming gardener from Fairview Park whose beautiful flower beds had been raided, ransacked and pillaged in an early morning raid. The following year's altar was a much more low-key affair. "Sheaser" eventually forgave me but it did take a couple of balls of malt to smooth matters out!

Then there was the case of Confession and the Deaf Priest! You can probably imagine this one yourself but I'll tell you anyway! Little Peter had, we can say with the benefit of hindsight, a form of Tourette's Syndrome. In those much less enlightened days all he had, as my sainted mother would say, was 'a foul tongue in his head'. We used to take the whole school to the church for Confession regularly then and as time approached for the next visit poor teacher had the job of preparing Peter for the sacrament. It was impressed upon him that he'd have to make a full confession and not to hold back as the priest would be very forgiving. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Peter drew The Deaf Priest when we got to the church. When his turn came the whole church was treated to a loud, no holds barred, confession. "Shhhh – quieten down", went the teacher and the immortal reply echoed back from the box, still at full volume, "I can't Sir, he's f\*\*\*ing deaf!"

You couldn't talk about religion in our schools without mentioning the two big events - First Holy Communion and Confirmation. There is a serious debate required about the place of Confirmation and Communion in the Primary school but I'm not going to stray into that minefield here.

I remember Paddy who came to the church for his 'Confo' in a horse and trap. That was strange enough but even stranger was the fact that he was unaccompanied!

He tied up the horse at the door in a scene resembling something from the Wild West and entered the church like a gunslinger entering the saloon.

Then there was Christopher who appeared for his First Communion in what could only be described as a Mafia Don's outfit - striped suit, spats, hat, tie - all he was missing was the Tommy gun.

Of course who could forget Tony and the stretch limousine - the first stretch limo ever seen in Ballybough. Tony and his family got into the limo outside their front door and were driven to the church for the First Communion. That might, unfortunately, be commonplace now; back then it was unheard of. What made it ridiculous was that Tony and family lived less than 100 m from the church! They could almost have got in the back door of the car at their house and got out the front door at the church without the car moving at all!

The best craic, I suppose, on immature reflection, was the rivalry between the boys' school and the girls' school when it came to Communion and Confirmation ceremonies. You see each took turns to organise the Big Days - readers, choir, music - "we do Confo, you do Communion" or "We do Communion, you do Confo". All fine and dandy except that the arrangement descended into a competition, a dog-eat-dog game of one-upmanship of who put on the best show, who had the best singers, the most perfect readers! Competition became heated and twisted (very inappropriate, all their fault of course), and each year the girls' school upped the ante with more soloists, more elaborate processions and even, God help us, dancers! Time for retaliation; tá Dia láidir agus máthair mhaith aige! Just when we needed it most, just as the girls were rubbing our noses in it, God sent us Johnny, a new pupil for the school. Johnny was a member of the Palestrina Choir, had the voice of an angel and was kept under wraps until the day of the Confo dawned when he was released on the unsuspecting public, or at least the unsuspecting girls' school. Johnny brought the house down - Pavarotti, eat your heart out, this boy was brilliant. A standing ovation in the church on Confo day? Game, set, match and championship to the lads!

After that, thankfully, the Big Days became suitably lower key.

### Time for one more? How about Moving Statues Cuid a Dó?

Colm is a very big strong boy, one of our Special Needs pupils who have transformed our school in recent years – the best thing ever to happen the old school but that’s a story to be told at another time. Anyway, Colm wanted to go home to Mammy. “Send me home.” “No”. “If I’m bold will you send me home?” “No”. “If I’m really, really bold will you send me home?” “No”. After thinking for a minute Colm grabbed the statue of the Blessed Virgin which had graced the foyer of the school for just short of fifty years and pushed her off her pedestal. The crash was heard all over the school; pupils, staff and parents came running to find a shattered Mary and a beaming Colm. “Now, you’ll send me home”. I didn’t – not even when St. Joseph followed the Blessed Virgin. Luckily, Joseph was made of sterner stuff – wood – and generous applications of glue sorted him out. I will regret to my dying day that I didn’t have a camera handy as the caretaker took the Blessed Virgin to her final resting place in the wheelie bin with her head sticking out. That surely would have been an award – winning shot!

*Wonderful, funny vignettes of life in a Catholic school in inner-city Dublin; great kids, great stories, great memories.*

Before you smile too much though, a footnote is needed:  
(The names have been changed)

**Paddy** died of a drug overdose after murdering his father

**Christopher** followed his obvious vocation and now resides in the Big House on the North Circular Road

**Tony** is now successfully running the family’s pub

**Johnny** is a surgeon

**Peter** is in Australia

**Colm** is in a special school

A B C D

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