

## **LEADING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN AN ERA OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

**Abstract:** In 2001 Brisbane Catholic Education opened its first ecumenical school at Gaven in a major growth area in the Gold Coast corridor. Three more schools have followed. All arose from requests from the local community in major growth areas. There was already significant co-operative work taking place among faith groups in the provision of services to their communities. In each case the initial request was supported by the leaders of these churches in the Brisbane region. The expertise and infrastructure of Catholic Education was then used to bring the proposal to reality.

This paper outlines the philosophy of these schools. Their development poses questions for those who lead Catholic schools in more traditional frameworks. Is there a need for more intentional and clear enrolment and religious education policies that provide for a more traditional Catholic approach? Alternatively, should school leaders look to define an intentional religious education and pastoral program that first seeks to understand the religious and family background of students and to intentionally address their issues as part of its overall school program?

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## **LEADING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN AN ERA OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

In late 1998 two parish priests in the Brisbane Archdiocese approached the newly appointed Executive Director of Catholic Education seeking support for the establishment of new schools within their parishes. Both parishes were in areas of rapid growth and had limited resources themselves to finance school development. What they sought from the Education office was the support of the office, and hence the Archbishop, in taking financial and administrative responsibility for the schools while ensuring the pastoral links to the parish communities were maintained and, as far as possible, strengthened.

The request was only somewhat unusual to this point, since it was a request to begin primary education for which Brisbane parishes had always taken responsibility in the past. However, there are numerous examples in the Australian church where responsibility for financial administration of schools has been taken by the Bishop through the Education office. In Brisbane this was already being done in the secondary sector by the creation of Archdiocesan Colleges, regional secondary schools catering for children from a number of surrounding parishes. By 1998 these were catering for almost 12,000 students and have continued to grow since that time. The request to begin primary education in the same manner had a clear precedent in the secondary sector in Brisbane and in other parts of the nation.

What made this particular approach different was the vision of the priests that they continue to co-operate pastorally with the leaders of other Christian churches in their areas. These were also struggling to provide care and community for an exploding population on the outskirts of the city. The local churches had worked together to share pastoral services in numerous other ways and now they wished to co-operate in educational provision.

This paper will outline the history of these initiatives and the issues that needed to be faced to bring the projects to reality. Fortunately, in taking on this challenge the Archdiocese and Education office were supported by Archbishop Bathersby's personal

commitment to ecumenism. His record was exemplary. As a member of the International Catholic-Methodist Dialogue from 1989-1995, Co-Chairman of the Australian Catholic-Uniting Church Dialogue in July 1997 and President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Archbishop already had significant credentials in being able to take forward the ecumenical dialogue. He has continued to do so since 2001 as the Co-Chair of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Working Group.

None-the-less the challenges were very real. Previous ecumenical schooling developments involving the Catholic sector, in particular the Seaford Educational Mission in South Australia had required a formal agreement between the churches, at least at the local level, under some type of Company or Incorporation's Act. While the land and buildings at Seaford were to be owned by one entity there was a clear intention for financial involvement by all of the church groups. It was proposed that the church groups be issued with debenture stock in the school development in proportion to their financial contributions.

In Brisbane, the situation was that none of the churches, including the Catholic parishes, had the resources to develop a new school and were unable to move forward without assistance. It was a real chicken and egg question. Once a community of parents of school aged children had been established and was supporting the school, it would be possible to fund development. How to form such a community unless a school was in place?

In response to the request from local church groups and a briefing by the Executive Director of Catholic Education the Archbishop then wrote formally to the leaders of the relevant churches in the Brisbane region seeking their support for the establishment of an ecumenical school. The proposal was to use the expertise and infrastructure already available through Catholic Education to develop a school that would have pastoral involvement from a number of local Christian churches. Although there was no formal agreement entered into at a leadership level, the support of leaders of Brisbane churches would ensure, as far as possible, continuity of pastoral leadership at the local level. Local churches were thus empowered to enter into their own pastoral agreements formalising their involvement in the proposed schooling.

The proposal to establish an ecumenical school in each of the regions first required at some significant changes to Catholic educational planning. Each school was in an area where, under normal circumstances, population growth would have suggested

that a Catholic school should be established. The decision to accede to the wishes of the local community and work ecumenically has meant that these ecumenical schools have been established in the place of what might be considered “normal” Catholic schools. However, simply taking the decision to establish raised further questions about the way in which the vision could be achieved.

How could the Catholic church and its Education office reasonably take administrative and financial responsibility for a development that was to be truly ecumenical in nature? Was it possible to have a “Catholic” school operating as an ecumenical entity?

Brisbane Archdiocese began the first two schools, Jubilee Primary at Gaven (P-7, opened 2001) and Emmaus College at Jimboomba (P-12, opened 2002) and has since begun a third, Unity College at Caloundra, (P-12, opened 2007).

Having accepted the risk of opening a new school, including financial responsibility for land purchase, buildings, future debts and employment of staff the Catholic church through its Education office had only begun to resolve the problems of these developments. The way in which an “ecumenical” school owned and operated by the Catholic church would operate and serve its various local church populations was still to be defined.

## **THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON ECUMENICAL SCHOOLS**

Foundation Vatican documents on both ecumenism and Catholic schools should have provided a major resource in planning for ecumenical school development. Unfortunately, the major documents on ecumenism make no mention of Catholic schools. On the other hand, the documents on the Catholic school make no specific mention of its possible ecumenical nature. Thus the project of beginning an ecumenical school administered by the Catholic church was breaking new ground.

### **Ecumenism**

Cardinal Walter Kaspar (2004) in his intervention on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar decree on ecumenism made the point that the Council wished to do justice to the fact that outside of the Catholic church, which had been proclaimed in earlier in encyclicals as **the** church of Christ Jesus, there were to be found “not only individual Christians but also ‘**elements of the church**’”. He saw these

churches and communities as belonging properly to the one true church, although not in full communion with it, and possessing “salvatory significance” for their members. The church of Jesus Christ is effectively present in these other churches, according to Kaspar’s interpretation of the Vatican documents, although not completely so.

*Dominus Jesus* (2000) , the most recent document on the Catholic commitment to ecumenism, despite a somewhat bad press upon its publication in some Catholic circles, emphasises this communion of churches. Those baptised in non-Catholic Christian communities are “in a certain communion with the church” (17). *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) states clearly that “the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian communities” (11) constitutes a communion between these churches and the Catholic church. Can this communion be made real within a school community under the auspices of the Catholic church?

Indeed, one part of *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) almost challenges us to do so. It makes the point strongly (31) that ecumenism is not only the responsibility of the Vatican but “also the duty of individual local or particular churches”. While it does not specify education as one way to engage in this dialogue, it certainly raises the question as to whether we are limited to special prayer services or whether we can actually put into practice the call of each person’s Baptism to celebrate together, form community and evangelise by spreading the good news to the world.

The closest that that Vatican documents come to defining the way this might happen in an educational setting is in the Vatican’s directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism (1993) which relates specifically only to higher education. However, in looking at the ecumenical aspect present in all theological teaching in higher education, the document provides some grounding for what actually happened in the foundation of ecumenical schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese. It calls for collaboration in “areas of common work for social justice, economic development, progress in health and education”. (50, 8)

The Directory (1993) points out that Christians are called to meet “in practical forms of co-operation and in theological dialogue”. (19) This is intended to also stimulate a wider discussion and more profound understanding. In the early days of planning the religious education curriculum the pastors decided that, at the appropriate time and at the appropriate age level, the differences in doctrinal interpretation among the churches should be consciously taught and explained. This appeared to be in line with

the intention of the Vatican document, albeit in a higher education rather than a school context.

### **The Catholic School**

To look for definition of ecumenical school development within the church documents on the Catholic school provides an even more difficult challenge than searching through the documents on ecumenism. There appears to be no direct reference to ecumenism in any of the documents.

The document "The Catholic on the Threshold of the Third Millennium" (1997/2004) comes close to such a reference in defining the Catholic school as a "school for all" (15) but the context in which this statement is made is one of providing an education for all, despite their material poverty. The document also recognises that spiritual poverty is a reality in many parts of the world and there is openness to the concept of a Catholic school addressing this directly.

Chambers, Grajczonek and Ryan (2006) examine official church documents on the Catholic school and the presence and status of non-Catholic enrolments in Catholic schools. They detect a softening in the tone of the documents over time. Although the presence of non-Catholics in the Catholic school is positively affirmed in all of the documents they reference, they believe the extent of the welcome has expanded in the later documents. They identify a significant shift in tone in 1988 where for the first time in the document *The religious dimension of education in a catholic school* there is formal recognition that students in Catholic schools might come from very different ideological backgrounds. This appears to include even non-Christian students and, although not advocating ecumenism per se, it does at least provide a basis to assume that non-Catholics are not necessarily present in the schools only to be proselytised.

The General Directory of Catechesis recognises two classes of students in Catholic schools. They are a mixture of those who attend for religious reasons and those who attend because of the quality of education provided. However, Chambers et al. (2006) also point out that the Third Millennium document (1997/2004) implies that this second group is welcome only when they "appreciate and share its qualified educational project" (16).

Thus while ecumenism as such is not addressed directly in documents on the Catholic school it does appear from this analysis that the church recognises and accepts the presence of non-Catholics in schools administered by the Catholic church. The documents also seem to recognise that conversion is not the sole aim of enrolling these non-Catholic students in Catholic schools. This at least opens the door to considering a school that sets out intentionally not only to enrol those of other faiths but to consciously work to strengthen and grow these students in their own faith and to provide instruction and pastoral care that is linked to this.

### **Defining the Ecumenical School**

In the absence of church documents that specifically define the ecumenical school from a Catholic perspective, the Catholic Education Council (CEC) and the Commission for Ecumenism (1997) had jointly developed a document within the Archdiocese of Brisbane on “The Catholic Perspective in Ecumenical Schools”. They had significant theological advice in this from Bishop Michael Putney. This was apparently intended to be the first of two documents, the second defining the way in which Catholic schools could address the needs of committed Christian (note, not necessarily Catholic) students in Catholic schools. Unfortunately, the second document was never written. The first, however, did provide the basis for the development of ecumenical schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese under the administrative umbrella of Catholic Education.

### **THEORY INTO PRACTICE**

The development of the three ecumenical schools in Brisbane Archdiocese arose first from local community requests and via a direct approach from the parish priest. Each community had already been working together among its pastors in an ecumenical capacity and wished to continue this by developing education provision. Each school community spent a minimum of twelve months and often longer developing their personal vision for their school. This was defined in an education brief that recorded the community vision for a range of attributes including the ethos and values, religious aspects, curriculum, learning environment, pastoral support and the organisation and structure of the school before moving on to comment upon the physical layout.

Since the model for development of these ecumenical schools followed closely the CEC (1997) model, it is appropriate to look at the document headings and the way in

which the education briefs addressed these as they began to form an institution that needed to be invented from the ground up.

## **Ethos**

The CEC (1997) defined the vision for an ecumenical school community so well that all of the education briefs (1999, 2000, 2004) in each of the communities all begin with the same quote:

“In an ecumenical school the ethos, the lived expression of the school community’s shared core values and beliefs, would be shaped by the collaborative spirit of all involved in the school. A special contribution to the ethos of the school would come from the traditions of the participating churches, and their effort to journey towards the unity Christ desired for all. In this way the ethos would be characterised by personal and communal prayer, reconciliation, openness to the spirit’s gifted unity, and by love which underpins every effort to build and celebrate relationships in the school and its community.” (P. 4)

An important aspect of the ecumenical dialogue, affirmed in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) is to recognise the “endowments present among other Christians”. In doing so we become aware not only of our differences, but the richness of our own traditions. For instance, early in our dialogue in each community it became apparent that some symbols usually incorporated in Catholic school buildings were not acceptable to other Christian communities. The crucifix was one such. Our Uniting Church participants pointed out that while a cross was acceptable, the image of a suffering Jesus was not.

In practice, the school designs were kept to simple, mutually acceptable Christian images. Pictures of the Sacred Heart are not to be found in these schools. When writing the education brief for Jubilee (1999) it was agreed, one suspects as a practical measure to allow the group to move on, that “further discussion needs to occur regarding images and symbols ..... to be incorporated in the school design or artefacts”.

## **Religious Education**

On this matter the communities choose once again to quote the CEC (1997) in their education briefs (1999, 2000, 2004).

“Religious Education within an ecumenical school will have Jesus Christ at its heart ..... It will give special attention to the study of ecumenism ..... historical moments of indifferences have emerged ..... events influencing relationships between the churches which have given rise to modern ecumenical movements.” (P. 9)

It is the policy of the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese that sacraments of Initiation are the responsibility of the local parish community. The other participating churches also followed this practice. This made it relatively easy to plan the religious education program in each school. The need for involved theological explanations of differing approaches to Baptism and First Communion, let alone Reconciliation was thus avoided. This led to acceptance by all churches that “the guidelines for religious education (R.E.) and the Catholic Archdiocese will provide the foundational framework”. The pastors themselves were most impressed by an R.E. program that was supported by the appointment of an Assistant Principal – Religious Education and delivered daily in every classroom. It was something beyond the experience of the non-Catholic church leaders.

Worship provided a challenge and a set of different proposed solutions for each community. The Jubilee community were comfortable with Eucharist being celebrated together, led by any one of the participating pastors. At Jubilee the vision was that they would ensure there was instruction beforehand on “the policies and traditions of participating churches and their approach to shared Eucharist”.

All churches involved in all schools shared a Eucharistic tradition. However, the Emmaus and Unity communities tended to emphasise celebration of the “liturgical cycle”, a feature also shared by all of the participating churches, rather than celebrating Eucharist. Reading between the lines it seems that, given the shortage of pastors in all churches, not just the Catholic, they saw as their most likely future that there would be a majority of lay led non-Eucharistic worship services.

## **Enrolment**

The CEC document (1997) defined a preferred enrolment policy for an ecumenical school with Catholic participation as accepting children who are:

1. *Members or participating churches*
2. *Members of another Christian church committed to the vision and mission of an ecumenical school.*
3. *Have some understanding of the particular Christian tradition to which they belonged.”*

In addition to these three conditions there were two further essential conditions that they defined:

4. *Open to journeying in faith with members of various Christian traditions towards the unity that Jesus desired*  
*And*
5. *Supported by parents who have an appreciation of and commitment to their own particular tradition and also a commitment to the vision and mission of an ecumenical school. (P. 10)*

All of the ecumenical school developments adopted the CEC (1997) enrolment policy, which is far more stringent in many ways than some of the enrolment policies in Catholic schools.

At Jubilee the founding vision was also that the Christian communities themselves, not just the pastor, would have an ongoing pastoral involvement in the life of the school. Laity, not only the pastors, would be available for involvement with the school and parents would understand on enrolment that the faith community with which they identified would at least make contact to invite them to their church.

Emmaus and Unity both had a stronger Catholic influence in their formative years. Whether for this reason or not they were somewhat less evangelistic in their vision. Emmaus simply wanted to explain their “vision of increasing understanding between other faiths” to parents when they enrolled their children. Unity were more in the Catholic parish tradition. They expected that “the college community will contain an appropriate involvement in the life of the Catholic parish and the Uniting Church”, the two co-operating churches in this instance.

These policies could be thought of as a spectrum running from clear outreach to people from the churches at one end to a requirement that the school and its population be

involved in the churches at the other. Each approach reflects the agreed vision of the local churches as they work together in education.

### **Legal, Financial, Governance**

The CEC (1997) vision was clearly that an incorporated body must take both legal and financial responsibility for the school. Brisbane Catholic Education did this as an arm of the Catholic Archdiocese, the incorporated body in this instance. In the places so far where these schools have been founded the co-operating churches have been satisfied with this arrangement since it exposes them to neither legal nor financial risk.

This model does, however, raise some philosophical questions for the Catholic sponsors. As a hypothetical case, could another school with the blessing of perhaps the Anglican or another mainstream Christian church be founded along similar lines? That is could a non-Catholic church be prepared to take responsibility in the same way for development of an ecumenical school while inviting pastoral co-operation from others including the local Catholic parish? Would the Catholic church support this? It seems to me that it would be difficult for our Catholic Education office not to support such an initiative, even if it meant we would not then provide a separate Catholic school in a particular growth area.

Governance of all new schools founded in the Brisbane Catholic Education community is by way of a pastoral school board model as endorsed by the Bishops of Queensland. Members are appointed by the Archbishop through the Executive Director of Catholic Education. The board is advisory to the principal and does not take management decisions nor management responsibility. The school is managed through the central office with the principal, the Area Supervisor, the various Directors and the Executive Director taking management decisions and responsibility as appropriate and as delegated by the Executive Director.

Ut Unum Sint (1995) recognised that the differences between the churches are not simply doctrinal. There are other “long-standing misgivings inherited from the past” (2) and that this is the case became obvious at Jubilee in the early stages as governance was considered. Although eventually the churches accepted the concept of management being the ultimate responsibility of a central office, it was treated with some suspicion. The openness we professed had first to be tested and trusted before

these fears were allayed. One of the early challenges to be overcome was the appointment of the principal and administration team.

### **Leadership and Staffing**

The CEC (1997) did not write in any detailed way about the staff but insisted that the principal should be “a Christian leader with an ecumenical vision”. (P. 7)

To accommodate this vision we had to make significant changes to our policy on selection and appointment of principal and administrative positions. We needed to allow for non-Catholics to be appointed to leadership in these schools. In doing so we chose not to resile from our core requirements re qualifications (in the case of a principal usually a second degree), religious education (8 semester units including scripture, theology and Christian leadership) and a minimum of 5 years successful teaching of religious education. We did, however, relax the requirement to be Catholic, knowing that it would still be very difficult for someone from another denomination, given the way church schools are operated in the Anglican, Uniting and other traditions, to meet the full academic criteria.

Fortunately, our credibility was proven at an early stage at Jubilee, the first ecumenical school. Although the principal appointee was Catholic, the Assistant Principal – Religious Education, was an Anglican with all of the required qualifications and background. All of the other appointees to administrative positions in the other ecumenical schools have indeed been Catholic. However, our openness to other appointments was proven in those early years at Jubilee, the first school founded in this new ecumenical mould.

In all communities the selection of staff was seen to be crucial. They were to be people who could “demonstrate a commitment to their faith and to ecumenism”. (Emmaus Education Brief, 2000, p.10) Confirmed atheists need not apply but those who profess a Christian faith and were committed to both their faith and to dialogue with other Christians were welcome.

**“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me” (Jn. 7:38)**

Are these new formed communities exclusively for the participating churches or can others join with them? Their origins were all different, yet each has left the door open for a wider ecumenical future.

At Jubilee the founding local communities were comprised of the Catholic, Uniting, Anglican and Apostolic churches. Emmaus was a local partnership of Catholic, Uniting, Lutheran and Anglican while at Unity College only the Uniting church joined with the local Catholic parish.

The reasons for involvement or otherwise of various churches were usually driven by local circumstances. The need to look after a nearby Anglican school, for instance, stopped Anglican involvement at Unity College, although this was no impediment to the Anglican pastor at Jubilee who remained a member of his local Anglican school board. All of the founding groups left the door open to other Christian churches who might later wish to join them.

The Jubilee community in their education brief (1999), for instance, saw that the participation of other churches would be subject to “ongoing negotiations”. The Emmaus community (2000) were more specific seeing that those who joined later would need to “have a theology which is consistent with the mainstream theology of the original churches”. They saw that an indicator of this would be mutual recognition of Baptism and a sharing of the affirmation of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds by any churches wishing to participate.

The future could well see some very different partnerships formed at local level given these founding visions.

## **SOME CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

The model of ecumenical school in the Brisbane Archdiocese is still relatively young. Hence any statements about the impact of these schools on their local communities and in particular in their local church communities must be made cautiously. In the longer term it would provide fruitful research to compare and contrast the outcomes for students, parents and staff of being involved in these schools, compared to mainstream Catholic schools. The type of leadership required in these schools could also be a feature of such research.

Ideally this research would first identify whether the school had remained true to its vision as given in the education brief. Some years on, has the vision of being very intentional with enrolment, employment and approaches to religious education and worship been faithfully followed? If so, are there identifiable differences between the young people graduating from these schools and those from other schools administered by the Catholic church?

So far the signs are positive that the openness in presentation of the Christian message and the intentional effort to provide for the spiritual and pastoral needs of those from differing faith backgrounds is bearing fruit. Although only signs, they may pose questions even now for mainstream Catholic schools nationally.

### **Multi Religious Catholic Schools**

Statistics on Catholic enrolment (NCEC, 2007) show that the numbers of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is now an average of 23% nationally. We have no national statistics on what groups make up this 23%. However, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority regard themselves as “Christian” at least for the purpose of census and enrolment. It is also reasonable to assume that it includes at least some significant numbers of children from families who have a strong religious affiliation with a non-Catholic church.

How should the Catholic school of the future approach the religious and pastoral needs of this growing number of non-Catholic enrolments? As an ex-principal, my own approach, and I’m sure this is probably true of many of my colleagues, was to integrate the non-Catholic students into the religious life of my school. That is, to treat them as “little Catholics”. I’m no longer sure that this is the best way. It appears to be the approach recommended by Cardinal Pell (2006) when he asks “what strategies might be adopted to strengthen the Christian faith and perhaps make **converts** among the 23% of non-Catholic students in our schools?” (highlights mine)

This is a call echoed by Fisher (2006) who, in recognising the increasing non-Catholic enrolment and a pervasive cultural opposition to religion in the wider community advocates that Catholic schools continue to make what he terms a “Catholic” contribution to education. He sees that this contribution should include the education of a sizeable proportion of children from other faith groups but that the Catholic school should be re-visioned as “a principle organ for evangelisation”.

Calls for conversion and evangelisation in our Catholic schools need to be understood in the light of the post-Vatican II theology of mission. Quillinan (2007) argues that this theology has changed from one centred firstly on church membership and proclamation of church teachings followed by a commitment to mission and the reign of God, expressed as Christian community. He believes a post-Vatican II theology now places the reign of God at the forefront. Only later are mission, proclamation and lastly, church membership, to be considered priorities. In other words the role of Christians is firstly to live out the reign of God in the world and proclaim the good news by example.

For Quillinan “Catholic schools are called to proclaim the good news by creating a community experience, an experience of the reign of God” (p. 6) He sees it as imperative that “Catholic school communities work to achieve some understanding of the history of each Christian tradition” (p. 7) and this is first of all achieved by dialogue. Phan (2007) quotes the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences as repeatedly suggesting that the only effective way for the church to carry out its mission of evangelisation is dialogue. He sees this dialogue in the Asian context, taking place with the poor and marginalised, with those from other religions and with the people themselves, recognising their particular background.

In the context of an Australian church the community background is often not directly focused on church at all. Quillinan (2007) further defines this dialogue as being one which recognises that the Holy Spirit is present in every time and place and secondly that the dialogue is between people who are engaged in a genuine search for truth. In this context, definition of the Catholic school as being a place of “lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds” (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997/2004) seems to imply that the Catholic school is a place for all who are open to dialogue and search for truth. It is certainly not, as the Declaration on Religious Liberty (1965/1992) points out, in any way a place for coercion.

One of Fisher’s (2006) other proposed options for future Catholic schools, one which he subsequently rejects, is to downsize the system of Catholic schools and provide fewer but religiously “better” schools. Yet in some ways, I would argue, this strengthened religious focus has been adopted by the Brisbane Archdiocese in a different way by providing focused ecumenical schools. These schools, founded at the request of their communities, intended to seriously address the differing religious needs

of their clientele. However, whether this has been successful is, as stated above, an interesting question for further research.

Francis (1984) provides a note of caution to the Pell (2006) and Fisher (2006) approaches. His research among British Catholic schools found that the enrolment of a large number of non-Catholic students appeared to have a detrimental effect on the Catholic majority. He recommends that if the Catholic sector is to maintain its ethos it needs to re-assess this policy on enrolment. On the other hand, research from over 20 years ago and in another cultural context must also be treated cautiously. The world of Catholic schools in the Australian context has changed dramatically since the 80's as the significant longitudinal studies of Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993) have shown.

Cahill (2006) takes a different approach. He recognises the “religiously competitive” nature of modern Australian Catholic schools but asks how Jesus might be presented “in a classroom where several faiths are represented”. In his opinion Catholic schools should “take as many students from faith traditions other than Christian as we can without damaging cohesion or Catholic character”. It is notable that Cahill’s recommendation goes well beyond being ecumenical to the stage of being multi faith. However, as pointed out above, it is highly likely that the larger percentage of non-Catholic students in our schools still have some type of “Christian” background and it is to this group that I will address future remarks and suggestions.

These approaches raise numerous questions. Are our schools to emphasise only the presentation of a ‘Catholic’ view of religion, with a view to conversion, at least for some? Are we about helping those of other faiths to understand our culture and point of view? Or, perhaps, should we develop our capacity to allow our students to grow as Christians true to their own tradition?

Francis (1984) points out the danger of diluting the Catholic ethos if we do not intentionally address the issue of who is in our schools. Arguably, the ecumenical schools do this by inclusion and acceptance. Could Catholic schools do the same? However, what would a Catholic school look like if it seriously addressed Cahill’s (2006) recommendations, at least in the realm of an ecumenical rather than multi-faith education?

## **The Catholic Perspective on Non Catholic Enrolments**

The Catholic Education Council and Commission for Ecumenism were intending to write a parallel document to their original paper on ecumenical schools that would have addressed this issue. What might it have said?

Would the ethos of the school have recognised the “special contribution” from traditions of those from other Christian faiths enrolled in the school? How would it have done this? By worship together? By inviting participation at times from the members of the other Christian churches in surrounding communities?

A Catholic school that intentionally addressed the faith background of its students might adapt its religious education program to suit the needs of its constituents. Would such a school provide for the teaching, where appropriate, of the differences in Protestant and Catholic traditions? Would it celebrate and accept the gifts that those from the Protestant tradition bring to this dialogue?

As an arm of church, is the Catholic school of the future able to provide a hub for outreach? The Jubilee model, where the intention was to contact and invite parents to visit their identified faith community could perhaps be used by a Catholic school with significant non-Catholic enrolments. In an era where probably no more than 15% of the 77% nominally Catholic students are actually church attending, such contact and invitation from local Catholic parishes could be a positive initiative. But, would we be prepared for the Anglicans and for the Lutherans to contact their own families through our schools?

These are all questions that we need to ponder as we look at the way we need to lead the Catholic school of the future. It will be a very different world and my own hope is that there are some visionary and brave leaders able to take forward the reality of our current student and parent communities in a very different way.

## **LEADING THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE**

Quillinan (2007) translates the change to the missionary focus of the church since Vatican II into a call for Catholic schools to first and foremost form community. Within that community it is possible to take up the Phan (2007) challenge to also create dialogue among staff, parents and students so far as this dialogue is age appropriate.

If the first task of the Catholic school is to create an authentic Christian community and, in line with Vatican II, actual allegiance to and conversion to church membership is not the first but in fact the final task of mission, this has implications for schools and hence for school leadership.

Firstly, the increasing numbers of non-Catholics that are in Catholic schools can be catered for authentically in a school that forms a real Christian community. Secondly, it would be inauthentic to organise this community as though there were an assumption that all of its members are Catholics or even believers. This is not in the tradition of dialogue. Ideally such a community would recognise and celebrate the backgrounds of all who form part of it.

Archbishop Phillip Wilson (2007) in his recent address to the Catholic Administrators' Conference based his comments on the work of Charles Taylor. He recognised that the conversion of large groups of people, in terms of a movement to formal church allegiance is no longer possible nor even desirable. He believes that each individual will make their own choice with regards to formal allegiance to church. Taylor (see Kavanagh, 2007) on whom Wilson based his remarks, believes that with regard to questions such as the meaning of life, the source of goodness and human values, "nobody has the standard answer that can convince everybody else and everybody who is asking these questions". Thus, Wilson suggests that we are in a multi-faith society with multiple answers. He believes this individual search is in fact in line with Augustine's theological tradition. For Wilson "leading people to faith can only take place with conversion of individual hearts and minds". (p. 9)

Taylor (see Kavanagh, 2007) goes further in suggesting that people such as the Dalai Lama provide a good example of extraordinary figures that can bring people to faith. For him they provide "a certain direction in a search that they can trust, partly because they were impressed by the way it was expressed, partly because the person impressed them". This provides the ultimate challenge for leadership in Catholic schools of the future. Those who lead them are challenged to be extraordinary people of holiness able to share their journey and their search. They will share it with their staff, who are also challenged in their own faith. As Wilson (2007) states "for believers, the challenge is to proclaim the gospel so that those whom we encounter may appropriate it as the deepest truth of their own spiritual journey". However, there is more to it than this. It is not simply proclaiming the gospel, as has been pointed out

above, the first task is to form a genuine Christian community and the second is to dialogue. This dialogue will first be facilitated by people of faith leading the community but, just as importantly people who are also aware of their own search and prepared to share both their certainties and their uncertainties.

Could this journey be undertaken by teachers and leaders who come from multiple Christian faith backgrounds? It is certainly a challenge for Catholic schools to think that leadership and staff could mirror the make-up of enrolments in the school. That is, a 30% Anglican enrolment is mirrored by 30% of staff being faith-filled Anglicans. However, if the prime task is to form a Christian community, then this may be where we are being called in Catholic schools today.

## **SUMMARY**

This paper has outlined the history and background of the founding of three ecumenical schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane under the administration of Catholic Education. It contends that the signs so far are positive for both the ecumenical dialogue and church ministry among the school communities. This has resulted from the close involvement of local faith communities in the schools from the beginning.

The paper poses a challenge for the majority of Catholic schools with increasing numbers of Catholic enrolments. It proposes the next step we might consider is to begin, at least in some schools, taking the challenge seriously of having a significant number of non-Catholic enrolments. This would be done by first recognising the differing faith backgrounds of the students and then forging links, when they might exist, with their own church communities in the spirit of ecumenical interaction. The leadership of a Catholic school that rises to this challenge will look very different in the future.

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