

Good Samaritan Education Australia A MPJP Case Study

Lawrence Hallinan¹



¹ Lawrence Hallinan, M. Theol, M.M. (Community, B.S.W. is ACU research officer with the Inclusive Governance in a Synodal Church project. He was the inaugural Executive Director of the Association of MPJPs 2017-2023

This paper provides a brief case study of the MPJP, Good Samaritan Education (GSE), which operates ten schools across five dioceses in Australia. This paper is one of six case studies produced by the ACU Inclusive Governance in a Synodal Church (IGSC) project in 2025.

The project thanks the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict and members of the Governing Council of Good Samaritan Education for generously meeting with the researcher and for providing additional reference material for this case study.

Process of establishing the MPJP

The establishment of Good Samaritan Education (GSE) has a long history that can be traced back to the mid-1800s.

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict (the Sisters)² was established by Australia's first bishop, John Bede Polding OSB in 1857. Their initial purpose was to care for women who had experienced disadvantage or abuse. Some Sisters began teaching in response to the needs of orphans and to meet the need for an income to support other Sisters. In 1880, the Government ceased funding denominational (mainly Catholic schools) schools in favour of free, secular and compulsory government-run schools. The continuation of Catholic education was only possible with the cheap labour of religious (including the Sisters), the provision of Church land/buildings and the contributions by parents and others.

The more than 200 primary schools and many secondary schools established by the Sisters over a period of more than 100 years were parochial schools operated under the patronage of parish priests and the local bishop. From the 1960s, with the advent of government funding, and the establishment of diocesan Catholic Education Offices, these parish schools became part of diocesan school systems. Over time, the staffing and administration of these schools was handed over to lay teachers. A small number of schools had been established on land owned by the Sisters and therefore remained under the direct control of the Sisters. In response to the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters began looking for ways to involve lay people in the leadership and governance of these schools. Central to this was the task of formation to enable lay people to flourish in these roles. In 1981, the Sisters considered the option of establishing an educational trust for their ten schools but separate incorporation of each one with the Sisters as "owners" was considered a clearer and more direct means of them influencing the direction of their schools.

² Hereafter referred to as the Sisters.

From 1981 to 1993, the Sisters formalised their partnership with lay people by including them in the newly incorporated boards of their ten schools, and over time lay people were appointed as Company Members. The Sisters established the Good Samaritan Education Council (GSEC) in 1993 to provide charism support and coordination to the ten schools. This Council comprised: the Leader of the Sisters, her appointees, and from the schools: two Company members, two directors and two principals.

The Sisters could see the time was approaching when they would lack the numbers to appropriately support their schools. In 2008-2010, the Sisters asked GSEC to seriously explore options for the ongoing canonical and civil governance of their schools. There was consideration of transferring the schools to each diocese in which they were situated. The major identified risks were: the school losing autonomy to a diocesan bureaucracy; that the diocese may not continue to support the charism; or that the diocese may close the school after considering it to be surplus or unviable. GSEC met with some MPJPs and with some religious institutes that had founded a PJP for their ministries.³ The GSEC findings were:

- a) it is important to have clarity about why the MPJP is being established;
- b) good legal, including canonical advice is needed;
- c) a group broader than the Sisters must appoint the MPJP Trustee/Sponsors⁴ because eventually the Sisters will be unable to fulfill this role;
- d) once the Sisters have transferred their ministries, their input to governance is only via one or more Sisters being appointed as Trustee/Sponsors;
- e) the Sisters can gift their charism to the MPJP and the charism/mission/values will develop in their own way within the MPJP;
- f) formation and establishment need time/resources;
- g) the position of bishops is key;
- h) ongoing funding of the MPJP must come from the ministries; and
- i) the future needs of the Sisters require that they receive a fair compensation for the gifting of land/buildings.

The Congregational Leader and GSEC conducted extensive consultation with the Sisters, the local bishops and the school communities. The feedback was that the MPJP option respected/assured the existing Benedictine-Good Samaritan ethos and best responded to the Spirit's presence in the signs of the times (i.e., more lay involvement, affirmation of the role of women, unity in diversity, greater accountability internally and externally). A distinctive feature of the MPJP was to be that it be a PJP

³ This project uses the term "religious institute" to describe Church approved communities of individuals who make a commitment to gospel life usually framed by vows or bonds of chastity, poverty, and obedience and committed to apostolic service. These communities may also be called orders, institutes, societies or congregations.

⁴ Good Samaritan Education uses the term "Member" for the persons who are appointed as responsible for the MPJP. This project uses the term "Trustees/Sponsors" in all of its papers to enable easy identification of the same role in different MPJPs.

of persons and be known and act as an ecclesial community. All stakeholders supported the establishment of a new PJP, Good Samaritan Education, to assume responsibility when the Sisters saw the time as right.

The Sisters called the five bishops with Good Samaritan schools in their diocese to meet together to hear of the MPJP proposal. The Sisters' preference was that the MPJP be established by a local bishop rather than by the Apostolic See. A key reason was to be consistent with the Sisters having been established by the Archbishop of Sydney. Therefore, the Archbishop of Sydney was asked to establish the MPJP with the support of the other bishops in whose dioceses the Sisters had schools.

In drafting the Statutes for the MPJP, the Sisters specified that any change to the Statutes required consultation between all the bishops whose diocese hosted a Good Samaritan school. The Sisters could see that requiring the consent of five bishops would provide the MPJP with more stability than if one bishop (Rome or otherwise) was the sole establishing authority. The Sisters made sure that the Statutes reflected the reality that the role of the local bishop is to ensure the ongoing catholicity of the school, rather interfering with the MPJPs legitimate right to manage its own affairs.

The Sisters note an interesting exchange with the then Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell. After reviewing the draft Statutes he wrote to Sr Clare Condon, the then Congregational Leader saying:

By way of reinforcing good, stable governance of the new PJP, to be called *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)*, it may be useful to have additional ex-officio members of the Governing Council of GSE, including the Congregational Leader of the Institute and possibly the Chair of the Finance Committee (SGS Archives, 2011).

In reply, Sr Clare said:

There are no ex-officio members of the governing body in a Benedictine community. The Benedictine charism of communal monastic autonomy has served the Church within ecclesial communities immersed in the scriptures for 1500 years and continues to do so ... The Benedictine charism is already firmly embedded in these Colleges. Under the canonical supervision of *Good Samaritan Education* this will continue. The Colleges are affiliated with the International Commission of Benedictine Education, a Structure established by and under the supervision of the Abbot Primate. It is anticipated that a member of *Good Samaritan Education* would be a commissioner, as is the case now for a members of the Good Samaritan Education Council.⁵

⁵ Correspondence recorded in Mary McDonald, *The Journey to Good Samaritan Education*. Good Samaritan Education, 2019, 66 <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Journey-to-GSE-web.pdf>

There are key messages underlying Sr Clare's response, firstly, the Sisters' commitment to the Rule of Benedict being the framework for the new MPJP. Secondly, the Sisters obtained and understood the expert canonical advice on the structure of the MPJP. Finally, a commitment to the integrity of the religious institute (and MPJP) and its right to hold a different view to a bishop and to advocate for that view in the face of hesitancy or opposition.

The Sisters chose not to use the conventional terms of "trustee" or "sponsorship" because these could give the impression that those involved in the MPJP's governance are temporary occupants rather than owners. The Statutes speak of Members who meet in Assembly and who elect from their own a smaller group to be the Governing Council.

The Sisters also ensured that the Statutes did not give them or any outside person/group reserve powers. Their thinking was that the MPJP, as an ecclesial community, needs to make its own decisions and be responsible for them rather than having another group potentially altering or verifying its decisions. There was also a sense of reality that as the Sisters moved to completion, they would be less able to exercise reserve powers. It was seen as more prudent to establish the MPJP with its own autonomy from the beginning.

In her address at the 2011 liturgy celebrating the establishment of GSE, Sr Clare said:

Those who are called to be members of this ecclesial entity are invited into *koinonia*, that is, into communion; communion with God and with one another. Their first task is 'to nurture this ecclesial communion especially through the promotion of a spirituality of communion in keeping with the Benedictine tradition' (GSE Statutes, 2011).

Such identity can only lead to mission, and so it is your task, as the inaugural Members of this body, to ensure *Good Samaritan Education* faithfully accomplishes the mission entrusted to it by the Church (Statutes of *Good Samaritan Education*). Service in love is the way the work is to be done; service which proclaims the Gospel message both in word and in deed. As Members, you are called to give strong leadership 'that listens, helps to form and express this vision, this Charism and Philosophy of Education' in the contemporary changing educational and cultural environment.⁶

The canonical transfer of responsibility for the schools from the Sisters to GSE took effect in 2011. The following sections provides an overview of the structure and processes of GSE.

⁶ *The Journey to Good Samaritan Education*, 68-69

MPJP overview

The GSE Statutes record its canonical status as:

Good Samaritan Education is a public juridic person constituted by the Archbishop of Sydney by Decree in accordance with canon 114 and canon 116 §1.

Good Samaritan Education is an aggregate of persons which is a collegial juridic person, in accordance with canon 115 §§1-2.

Good Samaritan Education is the subject of the rights and obligations which pertain to public juridic persons in the Church, in accordance with canon 113 §2.⁷

GSE's legal personality in Australian law is provided for by the Roman Catholic Church Communities Lands Act 1942 (NSW). The GSE Governing Council is the body that exercises GSE's ability to own/manage property, take legal action, employ people and engage in contracts/financial transaction.

GSE has two main sources of income. The schools pay rent on the land that they occupy. At present, the rent is used to repay the debt owed to the Sisters.⁸ The other main income is from a stewardship fee paid by schools for certain services from GSE. There is considerable government scrutiny of these types of related party transactions. GSE needs to prove that the arrangement offers the school a service that is at least as good as, if not superior, to what they could source from another provider.

The central focus of GSE is the gathering of its Members in Assembly. The Members of GSE gathered together in Assembly is the answer to the question "who or what is GSE?" There are currently 20 Members of GSE. The Statutes require that there be at least 15 Members and specify that membership shall include: one nominated by each of the five Bishops of the Dioceses in which the GSE schools are located; up to three Sisters nominated by their Congregational Leader; and others nominated by an existing member of GSE.⁹ In practice, GSE will often suggest a person for a bishop to consider as their nominee. While bishops and the Sisters' Congregational Leader can nominate persons for membership, it is the role of the Members to decide whether these specific persons will be admitted. It is possible that the Members

⁷ GSE, *Statutes of Good Samaritan Education*, GSE, 2023, #2, 3 and 4

⁸ In 2017, ownership of most of the school properties was transferred from the Sisters to GSE. A lease arrangement was applied to two school properties which comprised land/buildings that were still in use by the Sisters. The Sisters had an actuary calculate a reasonable value of both the Sisters ongoing financial needs and some degree of their historic contribution to the schools. The sum owed to the Sisters was then distributed across the schools on the basis of their enrolment. Other distribution methods were considered to be unfair e.g., value of land would have disadvantaged inner city schools whose land is expensive but who could not derive high income from the land as it is all used for the school. Similarly using the amount of land would have disadvantaged schools on the suburban fringe that have more land for the school's current and future needs and have less ability to repay debt due to the means of their lower income families.

⁹ Up until 2023, the Statutes required the Congregational Leader of the Sisters to nominate all bar the bishop's nominees.

could refuse a nominee and request that the bishop or Congregational Leader nominate a different person.

To be eligible for Membership of GSE a person must: (1) be a member of Christ's faithful and in communion with the Church; (2) be committed to Catholic Education in the Good Samaritan tradition; and (3) possess appropriate qualifications or expertise or experience.

The Statutes state the functions of the Members as being:

1. to nurture the ecclesial communion, which is the foundation of Good Samaritan Education, especially through "the promotion of a spirituality of communion" [NMI 45] in keeping with the Benedictine tradition;
2. to ensure Good Samaritan Education faithfully accomplishes the mission entrusted to it by the Church;
3. to preserve, deepen and adapt to changing historical and cultural situations the Charism of Good Samaritan Education;
4. to articulate the Charism of Good Samaritan Education for all those who participate in its mission;
5. to review and amend the Philosophy of Education of Good Samaritan Education;
6. to ensure the initial and ongoing formation of all those who participate in the mission of Good Samaritan Education;
7. to elect the Governing Council;
8. to elect the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Governing Council;
9. to appoint a properly qualified auditor for Good Samaritan Education; and
10. to institute, review and amend the Regulations for Good Samaritan Education.¹⁰

The functions above could be summarised as the Members are: the guardians of the GSE charism and mission, the facilitators of Statute/by-law changes, and the electors of the Governing Council. The Assembly of Members is fundamentally a community that gives life to GSE. Functions 1, and 3 above are not just words that are written and spoken by the Members. The Members nurture and promote *communio* by being in communion with each other. The Members preserve and deepen the GSE Charism by praying with it and discerning how the Spirit is moving within the Assembly, the schools and the wider Church/society.¹¹ The Members gather in Assembly for about three hours at least twice a year. In addition, Members participate in formation days in March and November of each year.¹²

¹⁰ *Statutes*, 2023 #19

¹¹ See Appendix 1. GSE Charism, Spirituality and Values

¹² In many ways GSE can be seen as resembling an Association of Christ's Faithful (ACF). The Canon 298 §1. definition of an ACF: "In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of

There is no expectation that GSE schools nominate people for Membership. In fact, Members of GSE cannot also be Directors of a school board. The GSE succession committee tries to ensure that there is a reasonable number of Members of GSE from the dioceses in which GSE has schools. They are also keen to ensure a mix of ages and ethnic backgrounds. GSE has found it hard to find younger people who have the time to be on the Governing Council. It is a difficult workload for people with children and/or fulltime employment. People who are interested in becoming Members of GSE are invited to participate in a GSE formation day as the first part of a mutual discernment process. The person then writes an application that has set questions/topics that the person needs to address. This is then considered by the Governing Council and the decision to accept the person rests with the Members gathered in Assembly.

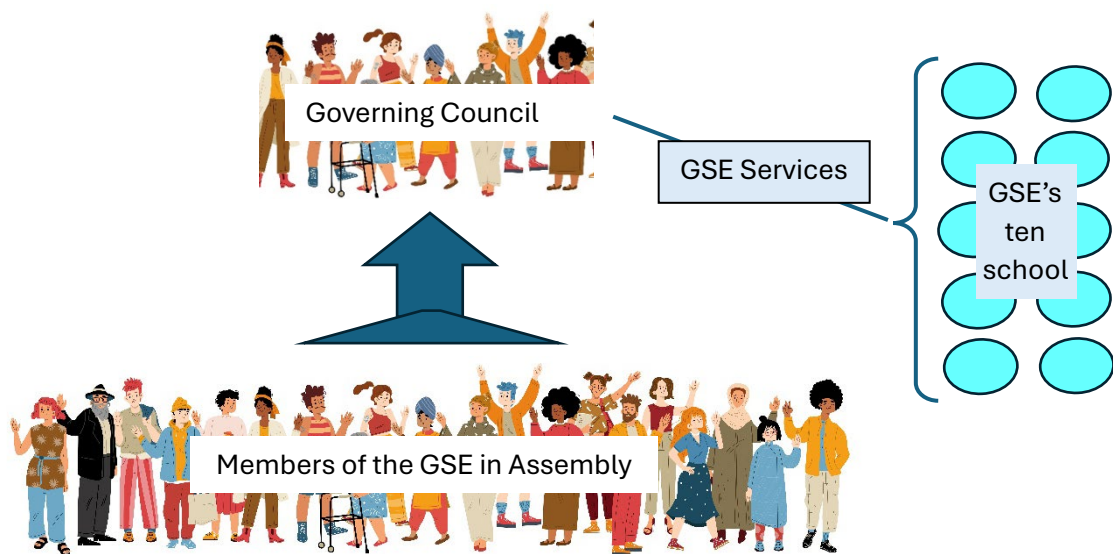
One of the functions of the Members gathered in Assembly is to elect from among their members the Governing Council and its Chair and Deputy Chair. Figure 1 shows that the Governing Council are and remain Members of GSE. GSE's process for electing its Governing Council is unique among MPJPs and parallels the Benedictine model seen in the governance of many religious institutes. Most other MPJPs have a person(s) appointed by one or more external religious institutes or bishops who appoint the MPJP's Trustee/Sponsors. Prior to their appointment these Trustee/Sponsors generally have no connection with the MPJP and are inserted upon appointment. As noted earlier, the arrangement at GSE is completely different. The Members of GSE gather in Assembly and appoint their Governing Council from among their number. Theologically, the dynamic within GSE is of Christ's gift of governance being given to the church community, as manifest in the Members gathered in Assembly, which in turn recognises those members of the body that the Spirit has anointed to exercise this gift of governance in service of the community.¹³

Figure 1. GSE Organisational Structure¹⁴

consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavor to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit." There many ways that an ACF can be structured and many purpose to which it could be directed. If canon 298 were applied to GSE it could be expressed as: "An association of members of the Church who support each other's spiritual growth and devote themselves to progress the Christian education of young people, especially those experiencing poverty/disadvantage."

¹³ See: Catherine Clifford, "Power and the Exercise of Authority in the Service of the People of God." *Studia Canonica* 58, (2024), 201—23. <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.58.1.0000000>. and Catherine Clifford, "Reflections on 'Peoplehood' and the Church." *Theoforum* 46, no. 2 (2015), 271—92. [https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=TF](https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=TF;);

¹⁴ Organisational chart by Lawrence Hallinan. [image from Freepics](#)



The Governing Council operationalises the charism and philosophy as developed by the Members of GSE. The Governing Council is supported in its role by the Members and it is accountable to the Members for the fulfilment of GSE's Mission. The Governing Council has full day meetings four times a year with additional short meetings being via videoconference. The Statutes require a minimum of seven persons on the Governing Council and there are currently eight members.¹⁵

The Governing Council employs a small number of staff to support GSE in its work and to help them resource/support and when appropriate coordinate the schools. The GSE service team is comprised of: Executive Director, Director of Formation and Mission Integration, Mission Program Coordinator, Director of Finance and Resources, Governance Manager, Executive Support Officer and a part-time Communications Officer.

Each of the ten schools is a not-for-profit company under the Australian Corporations Act with the Governing Council of GSE as the sole member of each company. Each company's constitution is standardised and common to all GSE schools. These constitutions include the requirement that the school be faithful to the GSE charism and adhere to any "member directions" issued by the Governing Council. Member directions include policies that the Governing Council as the sole member develops after extensive consultation with the schools. The Governing Council appoints the Directors who serve on each of the school boards. The school boards have a strategic role and major responsibilities under the Corporations Act for the good governance of the school. The Board, with the approval of the Governing Council, appoints the Principal. The Principal is accountable to the Board for the leadership and management of the school.

¹⁵ "Our People – Sharing the journey" <https://goodsameducation.org.au/about-us/people/>

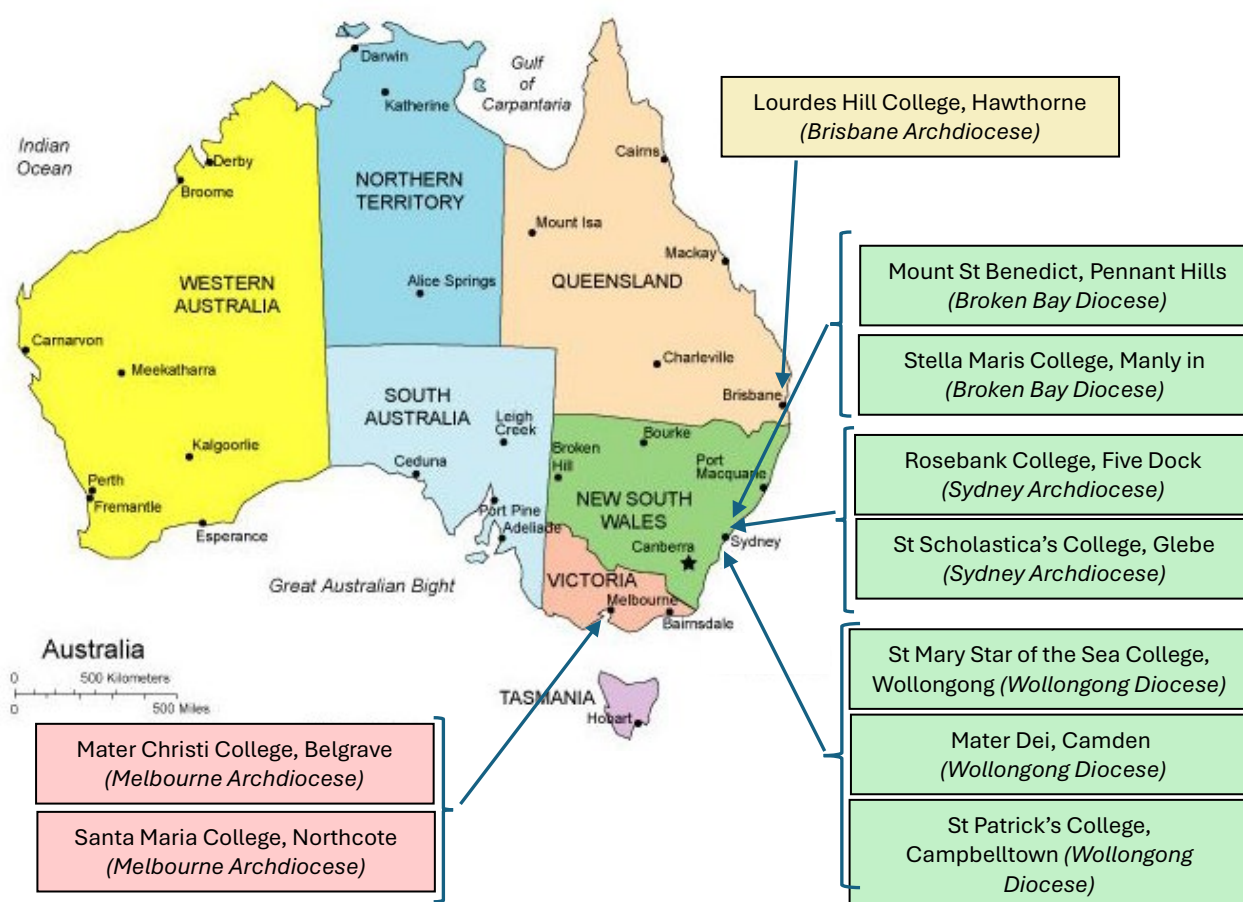
The school boards are seen as a significant and integral part of GSE. Each school board usually meets six to eight times a year. Evidence of the strategic thinking of boards can be seen in one school moving from being a girls-only college to a co-educational school and another college deciding to start enrolments at year five rather than year seven. The Governing Council seeks to support each of the ten boards develop their own strategic plan in response to their own unique opportunities and resources.

Table 1. The structure of schooling provided by each GSE school

<i>Structure of schooling offered</i>	<i>GSE School</i>
One college for girls, Years 5-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lourdes Hill College, Hawthorne QLD
Six colleges for girls, Years 7-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount St Benedict College, Pennant Hills NSW • Stella Maris College, Manly NSW • St Mary Star of the Sea College, Wollongong NSW • St Patrick's College, Campbelltown NSW • Mater Christi College, Belgrave VIC • Santa Maria College, Northcote VIC
One co-educational college, Years 7-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosebank College, Five Dock NSW
One day and boarding college for girls, Years 7-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Scholastica's College, Glebe NSW
One co-educational school and therapy service for babies, children and young adults with an intellectual disability or developmental delay,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mater Dei, Camden NSW

Table 1 and Figure 2 show that GSE's ten schools offer different structures of schooling and are spread across three States of Australia. State Governments have the major role in school education, child protection and family services. The Federal Government provides additional school funding. This means that GSE needs to deal with a fairly complex regulatory environment. There is also considerable diversity among the schools:

Figure 2 Map of Australia showing GSE schools¹⁶



MPJP's current successes

In interviews with the researcher, Sisters and members of the Governing Council identified a number of areas in which they see GSE as successful.

The calibre of people who have led and are leading GSE is noted as a success. These people are highly skilled, intelligent, spiritual and committed to the Benedictine/GSE way. Great care has been taken in choosing these people for roles as Members of GSE, Governing Council Members, and principals. Ongoing formation has also helped these people to more fully be the persons that God has called them to be. GSE has found that there is usually an excellent pool of applicants when positions are advertised. This gives GSE confidence in its reputation as an employer of choice.

The adoption of the Benedictine charism is another success. It was noted that the language used in newsletters and in speeches is infused with Benedictine words, sayings and concepts. This is true of Members of GSE, Governing Council, Principals, Board Chairs and student leaders. There is a sense that the charism provides the understanding for their present and their aspirations for the future.

¹⁶ Map license free from Pinterest, courtesy of Bruce Jones Design

A recent account was offered of the impressions of two Benedictine Sisters from USA who visited a GSE college. These Sisters were very impressed with the visual displays of Benedictine charism around the college. Mention was made of statues and glass panels that included the GSE values and posters on walls with passages from the Rule of Saint Benedict. The visitors were keen to encourage their USA colleges to follow the GSE example of placing visual reminders of the charism around the campuses.

GSE's statements on the GSE way are a contemporary and dynamic expression of their charism. These statements are a response to the concerns/aspirations of the GSE community. The Governing Council develops these statements with extensive consultation within and beyond GSE. At its creation in 2011, GSE had a Philosophy of Education and this was updated in 2015.¹⁷ Most GSE colleges have only female students and the 2016 statement "The Voice and Experience of Women in Leadership" speaks to the GSE's commitment to equality of dignity and opportunity for women and men.¹⁸ In 2022, GSE promulgated its "Schools of Welcome" statement. As its title implies, this statement says that GSE is committed to respect and include all. This statement names the following as people who are often vulnerable and excluded "First Nations Australians, people of all genders and sexualities, people with disabilities, refugees, and those from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds."¹⁹ The 2023, "Statement of Leadership" speaks of GSE leaders as being people of service, people who listen, collaborate, value and learn from others, are relational and build community, seek and are humbly open to the mystery of God.²⁰ The most recent statement responds to a concern for the wellbeing of young people exacerbated by the COVID pandemic.²¹

The GSE commitment to ongoing formation of the Members of GSE and of Governing Council is noted as a success. It is estimated that Members spend 25-30% of their meeting time in formation. There is also a priority for formation of school leaders. GSE has a Director of Formation and Mission Integration who works with schools to identify a formation focus topic for the year and to then provide resources. There are communities of practice across the GSE schools for principals, mission leaders, Chairs of school boards etc. These communities of practice mainly meet online due to the vast distances between schools and the cost of travel (as can be seen in figure 2). The board chairs meet in their Community of Practice and are also

¹⁷ Good Samaritan Education, *Philosophy of Education*. (Good Samaritan Education, 2015), <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GSE-Philosophy-of-Education-2019.pdf>

¹⁸ Good Samaritan Education, *The Voice and Experience of Women in Leadership*. Good Samaritan Education, 2016. <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Women-in-Leadership-web.pdf>

¹⁹ Good Samaritan Education, *Schools of Welcome*. (Good Samaritan Education, 2022), <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/GSE-Schools-of-Welcome-FINAL.pdf>

²⁰ Good Samaritan Education, *Statement of Leadership*. Good Samaritan Education, 2023. <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leadership-Statement-final-1.pdf>

²¹ Good Samaritan Education *Philosophy of Wellbeing* Good Samaritan Education, 2024. <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Philosophy-of-Wellbeing.pdf>

invited to GSE formation days. Formation activities respect each person's personal needs, past formation and learning/prayer approaches. Principals receive a GSE induction, when newly appointed they are assigned another principal as a "buddy", they meet with the other principals four times a year, they are encouraged to have a professional supervisor who understands GSE, and they are offered spiritual direction/accompaniment,

GSE provides an international pilgrimage usually every two years as part of its formation program. The 12-day pilgrimage takes 20 people to Italy to explore the life and times of St Benedict and to England to explore the English Benedictine story that gave Australia its first bishop, John Bede Polding OSB - the founder of the Good Samaritan Sisters of the Order of St Benedict. The pilgrimage is a time of learning about the wider story as well as understanding what it has to offer to one's own life. The pilgrim group pray individually and together. Many say that the pilgrimage has a transformative impact on their life and their involvement in GSE. One of GSE's learnings was that preparation is needed before people embark on pilgrimage to ensure that they understand the process and that they are ready for this process.

Another success is GSE's openness to review and change. The Governing Council conducted a review in 2021 and some of the feedback was that the governance structure was complicated and some people didn't understand the role of company members. This may be because initially Members of GSE were also company members at two schools. Over a period of about 18 months, the Governing Council consulted broadly to discern support for a new model where the Governing Council was the sole member of school companies. There were inevitable fears about the uncertainty of change but the Governing Council continued the constant loop of talking to people, hearing their suggestions/concerns, clarifying the issue, redrafting documents and consulting again. The Governing Council worked with everyone to bring them along and to ensure that there was a broad consensus regarding the outcome.

MPJP's current challenges

In interviews with the researcher, Sisters and members of the Governing Council identified key challenges that GSE confronts.

There is an ongoing challenge to maintain a sense of community of GSE. Most of the schools are geographically separate from each other making collaboration difficult. Likewise, face-to-face contact of leaders, teachers or students is difficult given the costs of travel, e.g, the distance from the most northern college in Brisbane to the two most southern colleges in Melbourne is 1,045 miles or 1 682 kilometres.

Being on the Governing Council is a significant time commitment. The Chair estimates that she spends on average a day and a half at GSE meetings/activities with significant additional time on travel and reading. Other Council members estimate that their workload is half that of the Chair. With schools across three

States, there is often interstate travel which is a combination of car and aeroplane travel usually taking the whole day or requiring an overnight stay. The nature of the role is that the time required will escalate in response to the inevitable crisis or major project and often quieten down during the long summer school holidays. The Chair receives a sitting fee for her participation in meetings, but all other time is voluntary. Other Council members are fully unpaid. Reimbursement is provided for travel and other expenses incurred during GSE work. Council members are aware that school company directors are unpaid, so they are reluctant to pay themselves.

MPJP's current expression of synodality

In recent years, Pope Francis has led the adoption of the term “synodality” to describe a way that the Church can better live out the vision of Vatican II. Synodality can be understood as comprised of expressions of theology, culture, structures and behaviours.²²

Synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiology textbook, much less a fad or a slogan to be bandied about in our meetings. Synodality is an expression of the church's nature, her form, style and mission.²³

Given the significance of synodality to the Church, this paper looked for evidence of it within GSE. The GSE philosophical/policy statements mentioned earlier were developed in a synodal manner. It is a sign of the maturity of the GSE community that schools seek a collective GSE position and that they want to know that they are operating in accord with the collective position. GSE keeps the bishops informed about these statements. The statements give voice to the GSE community's view on certain issues, but this is not in the form of shouting at the Church. Rather, these are statements made with and within the wider Church. The feedback from some of the bishops is that they welcome GSE statements. No bishop has ever raised objections to one of GSE's statements.

The development of the GSE philosophical/policy statements is one of many examples of the Governing Council's commitment to consultation in its discernment. It uses meetings and surveys to hear the voices from across GSE and its schools. The review mentioned earlier shows that the wider GSE community was also asked to comment on and suggest improvements to Governing Council functioning. In 2025 the Governing Council has committed to meet with the principals in the spirit of the Benedictine value of listening. This means that these meetings do not have a prepared agenda. Thus far, these meetings have been very powerful as principals give voice to issues that they have not previously addressed.

²² Francis, and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. *Final Document: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. (Vatican: Apostolic See, 2024).

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG—Documento-finale.pdf.

²³ Francis, *Address in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (Apostolic See, 2015),

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.htm

Prophetic Voices is a synodal initiative that began in 2022 for students in Year 11 (15-17 years of age). The GSE website says:

GSE's Prophetic Voices initiative provides students across our ten schools with a platform for dialogue and discernment to explore causes, projects, and issues they are passionate about, embodying Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition with the aim of promoting ongoing dialogue across the whole GSE community. There are two main components to Prophetic Voices; the sharing of encounters and justice projects that happen at individual schools, to learn from each other's experiences and the collaboration across the schools on current issues. Each year the cohort chooses issues they want to learn about and encounter at a deeper level so that they can be active in taking a position on current issues of justice and compassion. Students' passion and commitment will provide momentum for dialogue and learning.²⁴

Each year the students in the Prophetic Voices initiative give a presentation to the Governing Council and every three years to the Triennial Conference. Previous topics have included: integral ecology, homelessness, diversity, domestic/family violence, and Reconciliation with First Nations Peoples.

Relationship with other Church bodies

GSE works assiduously to ensure that it has a productive and respectful relationship with its bishops. Each year there is a meeting with each of the five bishops. Three or four members of the GSE Governing Council, including the bishop's nominee and the GSE Executive Director meet with each bishop. These meetings are not a one-sided report. They are a discussion about how GSE schools are embracing their mission and ethos. The bishops sometimes have suggestions, some of which GSE has seen fit to adopt. Principals also encourage their local bishop to visit for major events and the schools participate in relevant diocesan activities.

There is regular turnover in Board Directors and each has its own local issues. This means that the Governing Council and GSE services team need to maintain frequent communication to ensure that they are aware of and addressing each school's issues. GSE does not see this as a distraction. Building relationships responds to the Benedictine value of *communio*. All GSE Principals meet together four times a year and attend the Community Formation Days twice a year. Everyone knows when they take up these positions that these meetings are an essential element, so attendance is very high.

The relationship between GSE and the Sisters is synodal in nature. The GSE executive meets with the Congregational Leader formally four times a year even though there is no statutory requirement for these meetings and regardless of the Sisters having no say over GSE affairs. These meetings show GSE's respect for the

²⁴ "Prophetic Voices" Good Samaritan Education <https://goodsameducation.org.au/prophetic-voices/>

wisdom and interest of the Sisters. The GSE services team also shares a building with the Sisters' Congregational Office so those who work there have incidental contact, sometimes daily. The Sisters are always ready to assist if requested but otherwise they allow GSE to find its own way. There are three Sisters who are Members of GSE and they are a supportive presence. They don't dominate or rush forward with directions, they are seen as equal Members of GSE. The schools have a relationship with the Sisters in that most of them raise funds for the Good Samaritan Foundation that supports programs for women, children and families in Australia and overseas. Some students of GSE schools are beneficiaries of scholarships from the Good Samaritan Foundation. The only remaining organisational links are that GSE is part of the Sisters membership to the National Redress Scheme²⁵ and that the land of two GSE schools is still owned by the Sisters as they still use buildings on these sites.

GSE was a founding member of the Association of MPJPs (AMPJP is the Australia-based umbrella organisation for MPJPs). GSE has been an active participant in many AMPJP events and projects. The current AMPJP Council Chair is also the Chair of Governing Council.

Plans/hopes for future

In interviews with the researcher, Sisters and Members of the Governing Council articulated their plans and hopes for GSE's future. GSE is aware that maintaining and deepening *communio* among its diverse community has always required deliberate attention. This will continue to be the case in the future.

Investments in formation feature in GSE's future. For most of its life, GSE Members were often people who had a deep connection with GSE, with one of its schools or with the Sisters. Increasingly, new Members are persons that one of the Members of GSE has observed as being a person with a similar vision and values to GSE. Some of these people do not have contemporary experience in school education or Benedictine processes/spirituality. This will necessitate a change in the induction process for new Members as many of the previous assumptions do not apply. This may require some new Members undertaking different content and a longer discernment and formation process.

The future will require a thorough review of current and possible new expressions of the GSE mission. GSE Governing Council is aware that the schools need to regularly increase their fees to meet their costs, but this makes it difficult for families on limited incomes to enrol their children. GSE's missions requires that it look at various options to ensure that their schools are not just for the affluent. There are challenges in some options as the law requires that, excluding fair rent, fees raised

²⁵ The National Redress Scheme is a federal government agency that offers counselling and redress to survivors of abuse in an institutional setting, without the need for court proceedings. The Scheme was a recommendation of Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Scheme only engages with institutions who have agreed to participate and to pay any required redress.

in each school must be used for that school and cannot be used to fund another school or a GSE project. GSE wants its future to continue the Catholic tradition of using education as a means of enriching the lives of young people and their families, especially those who are experiencing poverty or other disadvantage.

GSE has also spent many years repaying its financial debt to the Sisters and will continue to do so until 2045. As this time approaches, GSE will need to consider decreasing the rent that it collects and/or redirecting these funds to other purposes. A review with discernment processes could consider whether the Spirit is calling GSE to work in new places or in new ways. Participants in this process will need to take the wider GSE perspective and free themselves from a singular focus on their own school. This period of communal discernment will take time to determine GSE's group mission for the long-term (e.g., 20 years).

GSE is also conscious that the Sisters will increasingly not be available to them as they move towards completion. The GSE Statutes allow for GSE to sponsor other works of the Sisters. The Sisters have a number of projects within Australia and in neighbouring countries. GSE has not been asked to consider what role, if any, they might have with most of these projects. This is just one practical aspect of the larger issue of contemplating and adjusting to a future life without the Sisters.

Conclusion

GSE can be seen as the result of an evolutionary process. It began with the Sisters in full control of the schools. Next, the Sisters set up companies for each school with lay people joining them as Company Members and Board Directors while the Sisters retained ownership of the company. Increasingly, lay people held almost all the positions of principal, board directors and mission leaders. The process culminated with the 2011 transfer of canonical responsibility for the schools from the Sisters to GSE. The relationship between the Sisters and GSE has continued but it is now a relationship of separate but closely associated Church entities.

The Sisters wanted more than to see their schools continue. They wanted to see the Benedictine charism and the GSE mission evolve. These hopes are coming to fruition in GSE. The essential dynamics of the Rule of St Benedict can be seen in the structure of GSE and the subsidiarity experienced by school boards. The many consultation mechanisms build *communio*, Stewardship and *conversatio*. The GSE actions and statements express love of Christ and love of neighbour as well as a commitment to justice and peace.

These developments within GSE are in accord with the view of Pope Francis that the “presence and participation” of “lay women and men” in “roles of government and responsibility” is essential as they equally are called to be disciples who make a contribution to building the Church.²⁶

²⁶ Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium. Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia and its Service to the Church and to the World* (Vatican: Apostolic See, 2022), Preamble, Article 10,

Bibliography

- Apostolic See. *Code of Canon Law*. https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html
- Clifford, Catherine. "Power and the Exercise of Authority in the Service of the People of God." *Studia Canonica* 58 (2024): 201—23. <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.58.1.0000000>.
- Clifford, Catherine. "Reflections on 'Peoplehood' and the Church." *Theoforum* 46, no. 2 (2015): 271—92. [https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=TF](https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=TF;);
- Francis, *Address in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*. Apostolic See, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.htm
- Francis, Praedicate Evangelium. Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia and its Service to the Church and to the World (Vatican: Apostolic See, 2022), Preamble, Article 10, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.
- Francis, and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. *Final Document: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. Vatican: Apostolic See, 2024. https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf.
- Good Samaritan Education *Philosophy of Education*. Good Samaritan Education, 2015. <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GSE-Philosophy-of-Education-2019.pdf>
- Good Samaritan Education *The Voice and Experience of Women in Leadership*. Good Samaritan Education, 2016. <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Women-in-Leadership-web.pdf>
- Good Samaritan Education *Schools of Welcome*. Good Samaritan Education, 2022. <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/GSE-Schools-of-Welcome-FINAL.pdf>
- Good Samaritan Education *Statement of Leadership*. Good Samaritan Education, 2023. <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leadership-Statement-final-1.pdf>
- Good Samaritan Education *Philosophy of Wellbeing* Good Samaritan Education, 2024. <https://goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Philosophy-of-Wellbeing.pdf>
- Good Samaritan Education *Communio Calling* <https://goodsameducation.org.au/podcast/>
- Good Samaritan Education *Prophetic Voices* <https://goodsameducation.org.au/prophetic-voices/>
- McDonald, Mary. *The Journey to Good Samaritan Education*. Good Samaritan Education, 2019 <https://new.goodsameducation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Journey-to-GSE-web.pdf>

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.

Appendix A. GSE Charism, spirituality and values



Good Samaritan Education
IN ALL THINGS MAY GOD BE GLORIFIED

Charism²⁷

Seeking God together characterises the Good Samaritan Education charism. Charism is a pure gift of God, freely given to members of the Christian community to enable them to live the gospel of Jesus in a particular way that brings faith, life and culture into harmony.

Benedictine spirituality is such a gift, having grown from the charism and insight of the 6th century monk, St Benedict, into a rich and wise tradition which inspired the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and continues to enliven all members of Good Samaritan Education in their service of the Gospel.

Centred on Jesus Christ,
the charism of Good Samaritan Education is to seek God together.
We believe that it is through commitment to each other,
in *communio*,
that we go to God (Rule of St Benedict (RB), 72:12),
our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love (RB Prologue 49).
Enriched and inspired by
the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37)
the Rule of Benedict
and the [Sisters of the Good Samaritan](#),
the mission of Good Samaritan Education
is to sustain and nurture communities of learning
in the Catholic tradition.

²⁷ Source: <https://goodsameducation.org.au/our-charism/>. Layout: Lawrence Hallinan

Benedictine Spirituality²⁸

Good Samaritan Education draws inspiration and guidance from the Rule of St Benedict, a wisdom text from the 6th century which provides universal and fundamental insights into human life and community. Adaptable and realistic in its understanding of who people are, and who they can become, Benedict's Rule offers a timeless spirituality, illuminated by the face of Christ and grounded in the scriptures, particularly the Gospel.

Benedictine spirituality serves as a guide for communal living of the Gospel in a socially responsible way and as a pathway for personal spiritual development. It is a source of transformation for a humanity that continues to question its purpose and identity in the midst of life's struggle to live together with dignity and in peace and unity. It calls for connectedness and emphasises an attitude of heart and mind required to meet the challenges that we face daily in responding to stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, prayer, and the human condition. Essentially, it shows us a way of life that connects us with God, with others and with our inmost selves.

The intersection of the Benedictine tradition with the life, ministry and culture of *Good Samaritan Education* impels us to be a community of welcome and compassion, a sign of hope in our hungry world in response to the Gospel question, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29)



²⁸ Source: <https://goodsameducation.org.au/our-charism/>. Layout: Lawrence Hallinan

Benedictine Values²⁹³⁰

Good Samaritan Education is guided by the Rule of Benedict (RB), inspired by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, and impelled by the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We draw our values from the ancient wisdom and living Benedictine tradition, and the Gospel inspiration at the heart of our mission given expression through the work of our community.

Love of Christ and Neighbour - The call to love and support others, impelled by the love of Christ above all things, is first and foremost a response to God's astonishing love for humankind, a love revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Passion for God and compassion for others are nurtured through prayer and scripture and are central to our witness to the Gospel and at the heart of mission. RB 4 begins with Benedict echoing the Parable: "First of all love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself."

Communio - *Communio* constitutes the life of Good Samaritan Education, a mutuality of giving and receiving, shaping our collective identity and our communal seeking of God. *Communio* reflects and lives out the web of relationships that underpins the participation of all its members, whose shared sense of mission is illustrated through humility and trust. Critical to *communio* is embracing the common good, strengthened through hospitality where "all guests who present themselves are welcomed as Christ" (RB 53.1).

Hospitality - Hospitality is the openness to the other as the person of Christ in our midst. It is about acceptance of others and creating a space that is welcoming of diversity and difference where each can be transformed by one another on a common journey. In the process of hospitality, we have a prototype for all our responsibilities toward others. A blessing accompanies both the offering and the receiving of hospitality.

Stewardship - Benedictine stewardship is about mutual care and recognising God in all things. Stewardship holds all things – the earth and all its goods – as sacred and not to be neglected. It is a fundamental revering of all of creation in its beauty and proper use, recognising it as a gift from God to be used ethically and responsibly for the common good. Stewardship is about caring for people as well as resources, and it extends to everything and everyone. Hand in hand with mutual care is mutual obedience – listening deeply to one another as we listen to God, with the "ear of the heart".

Conversatio - At the heart of our Philosophy of Education is *conversatio*, a commitment to a pattern of living that faces the demands of human growth and change. It is a lifelong process that requires perseverance, trust and love and a letting go of self-centred preoccupations. For each in our community, *conversatio* involves listening and responding – to those in the community, our neighbour, and to the unexpected as we respond with love.

Justice and Peace - Benedictine life aims to find peace. It is our legacy, our mandate and our mission and we must pursue it and work for it. There can be no peace in the world unless there is justice for everyone, especially the vulnerable and the marginalised. Our communities strive to inspire leaders for our society who will work for the common good, who will ask difficult questions about the nature of society, and who will advocate for those in need.

²⁹ Source: <https://goodsameducation.org.au/our-charism/>. Layout: Lawrence Hallinan

³⁰ The formulation of the above GSE values was inspired by reflection on its mission and the Hallmarks of Benedictine Education. In 2007, international Benedictine educators collaborated and distilled from The Rule of St Benedict values of transformative importance that ought to animate Benedictine learning institutions, resulting in a collection of ten core values referred to as the Hallmarks of Benedictine Education, including love, prayer, stability, *conversatio*, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community.