

## **The Context for Enrolment Decisions**

The inspiration for enrolment guidelines for Kildare Education Ministries (KEM) schools comes from the Judeo-Christian story, especially the life and mission of Jesus in the Gospels, from the Church's growing awareness of its inclusive mission and from a consideration of enrolment practices over many years.

Jesus spent much of his public ministry announcing that the reign of God is dawning, and demonstrating in as many ways as he could, its dreams of justice and love, equality and abundance, wholeness and unity. He gathered ordinary local residents to share the message of the *good news*. Inclusiveness is a key dimension of the invitation of Jesus. He welcomed everyone - saints and sinners, people of different races, religions and status, those ostracised by society, as well as the rich and the powerful. In all areas of school practice, we seek to be welcoming and inclusive.

In the first chapter of St. John's gospel we read that Andrew and another disciple met Jesus and asked, 'Rabbi, where do you live?' Jesus answered, 'Come and see', and they stayed with him for the rest of the day. Presumably, the shared experience on that day meant that the two became long-term disciples of Jesus. We believe that enrolling students is an invitation to 'Come and see what it is like when you try to live with a particular set of values and in a specific faith culture'.

Faith is best understood as "meaning making" and is part of the process of making sense of the world. In each KEM school, we offer a way of making meaning of the world by taking account of a personal God. We bring a faith perspective to the work of education by being sensitive to the Gospel messages and by establishing a framework for making decisions within a Christian community. This is not just through the content of the curriculum. The French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, wrote of faith as believing that, believing in, believing so, corresponding to the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of the whole person. Our task is to nurture young people to *be* in faith. It is this understanding of a faith culture that needs to be made clear to those seeking enrolment in a Catholic school.

KEM Schools have always been a part of the local community and as such have had a diverse intake of students. In both day and boarding schools there were many students who were not Catholic; our experience has been that these students have enriched the school communities and, at the same time, most have maintained that they themselves have been enriched by the experience of a Christian education. Many of these students who were not Catholic have remained life-time friends and supporters of the schools. Today, as neighbourhoods change, there is also diversity in the religious backgrounds of those seeking enrolment. An inclusive enrolment policy now, as in the past, is consistent with our Brigidine heritage and Kildare Ministries Vision, Mission and Values.

## **Making decisions about enrolment**

### **Whom do we welcome?**

Priority is given to families who actively participate in the life of the Catholic Church. Such participation provides evidence that they want to respond to the Gospel invitation to 'come and see'. Not in any order of priority, the following people are also welcome to apply for enrolment in a KEM school:

- For other Catholic families who have not maintained an obvious allegiance to the church, a request for enrolment of their children in a Catholic school suggests a search for faith and meaning and a desire for their

children to hear the invitation of the Gospel. We should trust that their search is genuine and respect their application for a place in the school.

- Catholic families from socioeconomic areas who have decided that Catholic education is not a financial possibility for them. Our schools should communicate to the community that all such families are welcome and will be given a place.
- Families who are among the newest arrivals in Australia, including refugees and asylum seekers, who are striving to become economically and socially established and who seek a school as a place of safety and sound education for their children.
- Families from other Christian traditions who seek an education underpinned with the principles of the gospels. After discussion which clarifies what the school offers, an invitation to be part of the community should be given to such people if possible.
- Families of other faiths and traditions may seek enrolment because they want an education for their children in a specific values-based context. If, after discussion to ensure that the values espoused by the school are consonant with those being sought, these families ought to be offered a place.
- Families who do not claim any religious faith and seek enrolment. In discussion, it may become clear that certain of these families are seeking a spiritual dimension in education. As a part of the evangelising mission of the Church, such families may be offered a place.
- There are individual students who for various reasons - learning difficulties, physical disability, need for a new start, changed family circumstances - seek a school where they will be safe and given opportunities to learn, begin again and be happy. They should be made welcome if it is within the school's ability to offer assistance.

## Implications for Practice

We aim to create a community of people where all are respected for their differences, abilities and varied stages of development. We will accept for enrolment those who wish to 'come and see' the education that we offer and be part of a community based on the values we profess. There will be significant opportunity for potential families and students to explore this basis of enrolment. Such serious exploration of the inclusive basis of our enrolment policy will make it clear that we are not conducting an 'inexpensive private school'. Criteria such as aptitude tests will not be used.

We believe that part of the identity of each Catholic school is to support faith development, commitment and religious values because these are part of the evangelising mission of the church. Therefore, each KEM school will offer as part of its invitation to 'come and see':

- sound educational programs;
- an articulation of its value base;
- a setting for faith and religious values to be explored and celebrated; and
- an experience of being people of faith.

Each KEM educational community will make explicit the elements of the education offered including:

- the cognitive elements of faith;
- the experience of love, commitment, loyalty and friendship;
- an active faith that celebrates the diversity of gifts present;
- a value system that adopts collaborative practices, justice and care;
- a community which attempts to practice what it professes.

Catholic Church teaching supports that we do not proselytise - requiring people to go to church or become Catholics.

*Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians. There are, in fact, countries in which the vast majority of the students are not Catholics - a reality to which the Council called attention.*

*The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognised by the Church. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law. [The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988)]*

The Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project defines a dialogue school “as one in which the adults in the school community choose to articulate their Christian heritage while at the same time remaining receptive and open to different cultures and faiths”. Research from the project indicates that the “development of a dialogue school is the way forward if schools are to be truly ‘Catholic’ and intent on the personal formation of all students. Through dialogue, all members of the school community will ‘get to know themselves better, become more aware of their own philosophical choices, learn to take responsibility for [those choices] and so deepen their identity’. This diversity of voices and perspectives will only enhance contextualisation in the school and facilitate a healthy, mature development of the Catholic faith tradition”. [Understanding and Interpreting the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSIP) Report of Your School, July 2014].

Our schools have a multi-faith student and staff composition. We need, therefore, to encourage inclusive liturgies, rituals and prayer. A formal Religious Education program for all students is evidence of the importance given to the religious basis of the school. This too needs to be as inclusive as we can make it.

What we offer is an open approach to belief and religious adherence within a faith community where doubt and questioning are recognised as important elements of identity, a search for meaning and faith formation, for young people and for adults. It is important that families understand this when making a choice about enrolment.

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