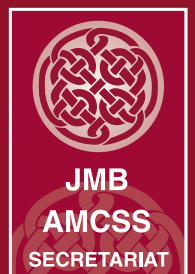




# Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools



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The Council of JMB/AMCSS would like to acknowledge the advice and support provided by the following in completing these guidelines:

- JMB/AMCSS sub-committee, consisting of Paul Meany, Siobhán Corry, Eileen O'Donnell, Ann Dinan (up to August 2009), Michael Redmond (since September 2009) and Ferdia Kelly.
- Representatives of CORI, trust boards and the trustees.
- Ian O'Herlihy of Mason Hayes+Curran Solicitors.
- Finola MacDonnell, Grainne O'Neill and Jack Cleary, Secretariat of Secondary Schools.







# Foreword

Schools are very much a reflection of the society in which they exist. The Catholic secondary school is a faith community which, in turn, reflects the parish faith community. Just as Irish society has been utterly transformed in the past decade with the arrival of a large number of people from diverse cultures and traditions, so Catholic secondary schools have also been transformed, due to the enrolment of large numbers of international students.

Catholic secondary schools have responded magnificently to the challenges posed by the arrival of students of other faith traditions and of no faith tradition. However, challenges continue to arise and management and staff continue to operate on a steep learning curve in undertaking the task of ensuring that every student is valued equally and given a genuine experience of belonging.

JMB/AMCSS is an organisation committed to supporting boards of management and school management in the network of voluntary secondary schools. JMB/AMCSS has noticed an incremental increase in the complexity of issues that have arisen as a consequence of Catholic secondary schools becoming multicultural in nature. To respond to the needs of school management, the Council of JMB/AMCSS set up a sub-committee to explore the possibility of providing guidelines on the issues that may arise when a school has students from a variety of faith traditions and from none. The sub-committee, consisting of Paul Meany, Siobhán Corry, Eileen O'Donnell, Ann Dinan (up to August 2009), Michael Redmond (since September 2009) and Ferdia Kelly, examined the issues that are arising and researched the wisdom that has emerged, both nationally and internationally.

It was the sub-committee's great good fortune to discover that Aiveen Mullally, Marino Institute of Education, had already developed a wide range of expertise in this area during her time as a member of the An Tobar team, supporting RE teachers in schools in the Christian Brothers' network. Aiveen agreed, with the kind permission of Dr Anne O'Gara, President of MIE, to devise a set of guidelines, under the direction of the sub-committee. Aiveen's energy and enthusiasm for the task are clearly captured in the guidelines. The commitment and advice of representatives of the trust boards/trustees and of Ian O'Herlihy of Mason Hayes+Curran Solicitors have also ensured that these guidelines are a comprehensive resource for school communities.

In publishing these guidelines, JMB/AMCSS recognises the wonderful work of so many members of school communities in Catholic secondary schools. These guidelines are a celebration of what you have achieved in welcoming and integrating students from a wide range of traditions into your school. Long may your great work continue, and our hope is that, with God's help, these guidelines will provide you with further guidance and support in your work.

**Catholic schools aspire to create an open, happy, stimulating and mutually respectful community environment.**

(Vision 08)

JMB/AMCSS hopes that these guidelines will support your school community in creating this environment.

**Ferdia Kelly**

General Secretary, JMB/AMCSS

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## Rationale

These guidelines arise out of an acknowledgement that the make-up of the Catholic school population in Ireland has changed considerably. Growing secularism and multiculturalism mean that Catholic schools often include among their pupils students of other faith traditions and of no faith tradition. Many Catholic schools are feeling challenged by the presence of different faiths in their school community. They are seeking guidance on matters relating to issues such as Religious Education, the celebration of the liturgical year and the use of religious symbols.

This document seeks to offer practical suggestions to Catholic school communities on how to welcome and facilitate all students, including those of different faiths, while remaining true to the characteristic spirit of their school and the Gospel values that motivate Catholic education.

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## The Changing Context for Catholic Schools

The prevailing climate in Ireland over the last decade of rapid change and diversification has resulted in many changes and challenges to Catholic schools. The secularisation of Ireland has brought our educational system into a complex arena, a dominance of Catholic education servicing an increasingly religiously diverse and secular population.

The current debate on the view that the Catholic Church has a dominant patronage of education in Ireland is particularly strong. What we must remember is that this situation arises out of a historical context where the vast majority of the Irish population was Catholic and wished to send their children to Catholic schools. During penal times, schools for Catholics were forbidden until the Relief Acts of the late eighteenth century when Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley and Edmund Rice, among others, began to establish schools for Catholic children. Following Catholic emancipation in 1829, the Catholic community was anxious to assert its new-found freedom and to establish schools which reflected its sense of identity. We see a similar process in contemporary Ireland, where minority faiths and other groups are now seeking to establish primary and secondary schools which reflect their own identity and ethos.

This diversification in the provision of education is widely welcomed, as it reflects and provides for the changing demographics of modern Ireland. It is right that the provision of schools reflects the needs and wishes of a changing population. Equally, it is right that there will continue to be denominational schools which serve the needs of parents who wish to educate their children within a particular faith and identity.



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## Catholic Education and the Catholic School

Catholic education is a reality that derives its thrust and ultimate foundation from the person of Christ. The Church is committed to education in virtue of her conviction that ... the Gospel of Christ is a living reality which frees and liberates, heals and saves, reconciles and transforms human beings.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic school is a Christian community where every pupil is valued equally and given a genuine experience of belonging. Due to the universal, non-discriminatory nature of Catholicism and the value it places on ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, Catholic schools are open to the admission of pupils of all faiths and none. In the Church document *Nostra Aetate*, great emphasis is placed on the regard and respect the Catholic Church holds for different faith traditions.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men [women].<sup>2</sup>

Many schools report a huge increase in the number of parents from different faith backgrounds wishing to enrol their children in their Catholic school. Some may say that this is due to a lack of choice. It may also be because of the values and philosophy of education held by the Catholic school. The single-sex aspect of many of the schools is also attractive to many parents. 'Most Irish Muslim pupils currently attend Catholic schools, generally due to their parents' preference for single-sex education.'<sup>3</sup>

While schools are happy to welcome and facilitate these parents, they are also conscious of the need to uphold the school's Catholic ethos or 'characteristic spirit', as it is described in the Education Act (1998). At the same time, there is a keen awareness that the Catholic school can no longer take for granted that its Catholic pupils are necessarily practising Catholics. Catholic schools are increasingly admitting students who are only nominally Catholic and whose parents often show little interest in the faith development of their son or daughter. At the same time, we are looking at ways to cater for students of different faiths, who are often the students who are most committed to their own religious tradition, as are their families. There can be some apprehension in schools about how best to honour the spiritual formation of all pupils, including those of different faiths.

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*Before we can comfortably host students of other faiths and their needs, it seems necessary that we address our own identity as Catholic schools.*

This dilemma should not be seen as a threat to the characteristic spirit of a Catholic school. Rather, it could be an opportunity to involve all partners of the school community in a review of what it means to be a Catholic school in a contemporary context. Does it still have value? Does it still have something to offer? Before we can comfortably host students of other faiths and their needs, it seems necessary that we address our own identity as Catholic schools and how we approach the responsibilities we have towards the faith development of Catholic students. This is a worthwhile process to undergo with staff and parents, and support is offered by the different Trust bodies through their Charters and Ethos Development personnel.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Lane (1991), *Catholic Education and the School: Some Theological Reflections*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI (1965), *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions – Nostra Aetate*, par. 2.

<sup>3</sup> S. Skuce (2006), *The Faiths of Ireland*, p. 61.

## The Catholic School as Inclusive Community

Catholic education values tolerance and inclusiveness. In an increasingly multicultural society, it is open to generous dialogue with Christians of other traditions and those of other faiths and none, while remaining true to its own distinctive ethos. Catholic schools are open to children of all denominations. The presence of children from other denominations is seen as an enrichment of the educational experience offered by the school and as a practical expression of the commitment to inclusivity. Indeed, Catholic schools are to the fore in welcoming the 'New Irish' in both primary and post-primary schools. The schools see such diversity as offering opportunities for deeper understanding among people holding diverse convictions. They also promote the common good of society as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

People of other faiths should feel welcome and at home in our schools. A genuinely Catholic ethos is based on universal values which are formative for people of all faiths and is respectful of traditions other than our own.

One way of promoting inclusivity in schools is to devise an **Intercultural Week** in the school on an annual basis. There is an Intercultural Week organised nationally every year, which provides an important opportunity to organise events that focus on celebrating diversity. Religious diversity can be an integral part of the elements highlighted.

The characteristic spirit of a school need not be compromised by the presence of other faiths. Indeed, it is very often enriched if we are a Community of Faith, secure in our own identity. The Education Act states:

A recognised school shall ... promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students ... having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

(Education Act S.9 (d))

The Equal Status Act (2000) states that if our schools are over-subscribed, we are entitled (not obliged) to give preference to applicants of the same denomination.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, primarily Catholic schools have an obligation to provide Catholic pupils with an education and formation in their faith tradition. They also have an obligation, due to their ethos, to welcome pupils of other faiths and to encourage and facilitate, where possible, their spiritual and moral growth. However, they do not have an obligation to provide them with an education or formation in their own faith. A student of a different denomination cannot insist that religious instruction in that denomination be provided. The Catholic school, however, should always encourage students from different faiths to grow and develop in their own faith.



<sup>4</sup> Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, *Vision 08*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Equal Status Act 2000: 'Where the establishment is a school providing primary or post-primary education to students and the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, it admits persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others or it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of that denomination and, in the case of a refusal, it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.' (Article 7 (3)(2)(c))





## The European Context

It may be useful at this stage to look to Europe for different examples of how it has responded to similar situations. The Council of Europe remained neutral on issues related to religion and religious diversity until after the al-Qaeda attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, when intercultural and global dialogue became a key theme.

The EU allows each state the autonomy to decide how to deliver religious education. The European context for Catholic education varies between states. In Greece, state schools are Orthodox Catholic, while in France there is a total separation between religion and the state and state schools remain secular. Essentially, the EU allows member states autonomy over their own decisions for state schooling. It acknowledges the rights of parents to choose their child's schooling and believes it falls to the individual state to uphold the quality of education being delivered rather than the religious affiliation of the schools.

In Austria, the state obliges denominational schools to provide religious instruction for the different faith backgrounds of all of the students in the school, when requested. Belgium is similar to Ireland in that a majority of its population is Catholic. However, they

have coined the term the *70:7 paradox*; 70 per cent of their population is Catholic but only 7 per cent practise. Belgium's response to religious diversity in their schooling system takes two approaches. In Francophone Belgium, Catholic schools are state-funded and entitled to uphold their ethos. Students of different faiths are provided for in public schools. In Flemish Belgium, if a large number of students in the Catholic school are from another faith, the school will seek to facilitate the encouragement of their faith. However, the state does not oblige the school to do so.

These guidelines have been written to address the *current reality* for Catholic education in Ireland. Many of the challenges and opportunities facing Catholic schools today were unheard of twenty years ago and it is possible that the reality for Catholic schools in Ireland may change in the coming years. We are now operating within a European context and attention needs to be paid to evolving EU law and changes that may occur in the future. Irish and EU law concur that a school must be clear about its own characteristic spirit and what the school is and is not obliged to do when enrolling students of other faith traditions.



## Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths

### Enrolment

A lot of difficulty can be prevented if schools have a clear **Admissions Policy**. A school should clearly state in its Admissions Policy that it is a Catholic school. In the case of a school that is in the position to enrol pupils of other faiths, it is suggested that:

- ▶ It be clearly stated that Religious Education is a **core subject** on the school curriculum and an integral part of the ethos of the school. All pupils are encouraged to participate in RE. However, this does not affect the legal rights of parents as set out in the Constitution to withdraw their son or daughter from Religious Instruction.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Subjects such as music, PE and RSE should also be discussed with parents from different religious backgrounds. These subjects will be looked at later in these guidelines.
- ▶ Parents or guardians of **all incoming pupils** are sent appropriate literature, including the Mission Statement and Charter outlining the ethos and expectations of the school. An invitation is also issued to all parents to meet with the principal before acceptance. This provides an opportunity for both the principal and the parents to be left in no doubt as to the expectations of the school from the outset, avoiding possible future conflict. This applies to parents who are 'nominally Catholic' as well as parents from other faith traditions.

**N.B. It is worth discussing with parents who are concerned about the content of the RE class that the syllabi have changed in their approach and are not proselytising in nature.**



### Religious Education

The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated with the education of the pupils.<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose of this document, the term 'religious instruction' will be regarded and referred to as 'faith formation' as there is a difference in understanding between religious instruction and religious education in contemporary culture. Faith formation will be addressed later in these guidelines.

In Catholic schools, Religious Education should be at the heart of the curriculum. The subject should be allocated the correct minimum requirement of three periods per week on the timetable and, at the very least, qualified and specialist teachers should be allocated to teach Religious Education.

All parents should be made aware of the new Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus (NCCA, 2000) as some parents may think its approach is doctrinal and proselytising in nature. Parents of other faiths should be informed that the syllabus is a positive step forward in promoting understanding of other faiths as well as the Christian faith.

Religious Education should ensure that students are exposed to a broad range of religious traditions and to the non-religious interpretation of life. It has a particular role to play in the curriculum in the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of Ireland: 'Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.' (Article 44 (4))

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II (1979), *Catechesi Tradendae*, par. 69.

It seeks to develop in students the skills needed to engage in meaningful dialogue with those of other, or of no religious traditions.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that the syllabus is a state syllabus, written to encompass **all faiths** and none.<sup>9</sup> There is no reason why students of different faiths in a Catholic school should not participate fully in this syllabus, whether the class is sitting the exam or not. However, denominational schools, with a particular characteristic spirit or ethos, should be and are entitled to teach the syllabus through the lens of their own religious tradition.

In practical terms, this would mean that in the section on *Communities of Faith*, for example, Catholic schools will invite their students to study their parish and Catholic community. This is not to say, however, that students from different faith traditions cannot be encouraged to study their own community and relate the exam questions to their own community of faith.

The presence of other religious traditions in the Religious Education class is an ideal opportunity for **peer teaching**. For example, Muslim pupils could be invited to speak to their class and other classes about their beliefs.

Parental **fears around proselytising** need to be addressed in a spirit of understanding, especially parents of other faiths. Ways of doing this could be as follows:

- ▶ A member of the Religious Education team could be invited to present an outline of the RE syllabus at an evening for the parents of incoming first years.
- ▶ Fears of proselytising can sometimes be allayed if the school can lend parents the RE textbook which they can review at home.

- ▶ Parents could also be informed that a copy of the syllabus can be found on the Department of Education website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)) or obtained from the Government Publications Office in Molesworth Street, Dublin.

**N.B. It should also be made clear that their son or daughter will be experiencing the values and ethos of the school in the day-to-day running of the school, not just in RE class. If the parents are concerned about the Christian content in the curriculum, they should be encouraged to see it as a civic education for their son or daughter to understand more about the history and heritage of Ireland. There would never be any effort to 'convert' their son or daughter to Catholicism.**



<sup>8</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2000), *Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see Appendix A for the aims of the Junior Certificate Religious Education syllabus.



## Withdrawal from RE Class

Some parents, however, do have concerns and may wish to withdraw their child from RE class, as is their constitutional right.<sup>10</sup> A student cannot be required to receive religious education from a particular faith basis against the wishes of the student's parents or against his or her own wishes once he or she turns eighteen years of age. However, **withdrawal from religion class** needs to be negotiated with school management and hopefully addressed during their enrolment meeting.

Withdrawing students from RE class can present the school with considerable logistical and supervision dilemmas. In cases such as this, a school should make it clear that responsibility for **supervision** of the student at such times lies with the parents. This is because it may not be possible for the school to provide for such supervision of their son or daughter within the Department of Education's staff allocation to the school.

### Approaches to Managing Withdrawal from RE Class

► Students of other faiths sit at the back of the class during RE time. This is not ideal, and if it is feasible and the school has a local solution to supervision, like the library, students could be invited to go there during RE class. However, it is important that the school insists that this is not a 'free class' to do homework. This is the allocated time on the timetable for Religious Education and faith formation and students of other faiths should be required to use this time to study something relating to their own religious tradition, for example, a sacred text. If a student is humanist or a non-believer, there is still relevant literature or philosophical texts that could be read during this time, for example *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder or *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. This approach highlights the importance the school places on the religious or spiritual formation of *all* of its students. All students have their own personal journey that should be encouraged and respected.



*Catholic schools hold at the heart of their enterprise the nurturing of the faith of all of their students.*

- If practical, and if there is enough of a cohort of students of a particular faith tradition, it would be respectful and hospitable to invite ministers or leaders from that faith community into the school during RE times to meet with pupils from that faith. This would emphasise a spirit of welcome and inclusiveness, but is at the discretion of the school. The school should ensure that the person invited in has an ability to teach and is of good standing in their community.

### Fostering Faith Development

Catholic schools hold at the heart of their enterprise the nurturing of the faith of all of their students. This has become increasingly more challenging and teachers can no longer presume a commitment to faith in their students. Larger cohorts of students are presenting with secular backgrounds and many are only nominally Catholic. The educational Charter for the Le Chéile Schools Trust addresses this issue with great insight and clarity. It recommends the following approach:

The work of Faith Formation is through invitation, not coercion. It recognises that individuals are at different places in their personal faith journeys. Some students from other faiths and from other Christian

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of Ireland: 'The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.' (Article 42 (1))



Prayer and sacramental experience need to be a central feature of a Catholic school.

denominations will have enrolled in the school. Their different traditions will be respected. They will be **encouraged** to grow in knowledge and appreciation of their own tradition. Other students may come to the school with limited ability to engage with the spiritual. The general programme of the school will be considered as a form of **pre-evangelisation**. This promotes a human development that focuses on the emotional and aesthetic, thus enabling the young person to experience God at a deep and spiritual level. Other students may come to the school with limited knowledge of the Catholic tradition, or with low levels of familiarity with Catholic liturgy and rituals. In this situation, the school acts in an **evangelisation** role. It helps them develop that knowledge. They are helped to reflect on their life experiences in the light of Christian revelation and invited to **discipleship** through a personal faith commitment. Still others will come to the school having already made a significant commitment to their faith. They will come from supportive homes and parish communities. The school seeks to give special **support** to this group, and to help them explore, in a deeper way, the commitment of discipleship.<sup>11</sup>

This approach recommends that Catholic schools facilitate all of their students 'where they are at' in their faith formation. There is such diversity in religious affiliation and commitment to faith among students in schools today that teachers and leaders in Catholic schools need to adapt how we foster the faith development in students and respond to their different needs.

### Prayer and Ritual

An increasing number of our students have less and less experience of ritual and prayer outside that which they are offered in the school context. The Catholic school community differs from other schools in how it celebrates its Catholic faith through community prayer and liturgy. Prayer and sacramental experience need to be a central feature of a Catholic school. Prayer can take many forms and can occur intermittently throughout the day. This needs to be made very clear to parents who may feel sensitive about it. The ethos of the school permeates the school day.

When there is a prayer before class, students of other faiths should be encouraged to show reverence during the prayer, promoting respect for the prayer experience. They do not have to participate in the prayer but could be encouraged to use the time to pray quietly in their own way, thus honouring the spirituality of all of the students.

The importance of prayer can be emphasised and fostered by holding regular **assemblies** for the whole school which include a formal time for prayer and reflection. Classes can take it in turns to take responsibility for the preparation of a short, inclusive prayer service and even highlight important festivals of other faith traditions throughout the year during these assemblies (e.g. Ramadan, Diwali or Hanukkah).

**N.B. Essentially, all students are encouraged to grow in their own faith or spirituality whether it is Catholic or not.**

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<sup>11</sup> Le Chéile Catholic Schools Trust, *Charter*, p. 7.

## The Liturgical Year

Worship of God through prayer and the celebration of liturgy and the sacraments, 'the doors to the sacred', belongs at the very centre of the Catholic school's life.<sup>12</sup>

The **liturgical seasons** should be marked in a Catholic school. Traditionally, schools mark liturgical events and seasons such as Advent, Ash Wednesday, etc. With the decrease in the number of priests available to visit schools, this practice is diminishing and requires a more creative approach on the part of RE teachers and chaplains. Whilst it is not necessary to hold a Mass for all occasions, schools should be mindful that for many students today, their only sacramental experiences may be in the school context. If there is a prayer room in the school, class services or a lunch-time service can also be arranged and led by the RE teachers or school chaplain.

In essence, a Catholic school needs to be welcoming, outreaching and inclusive, celebrating the diversity of all people. The only sacraments that can be celebrated in the life of the school are Eucharist and Reconciliation. These should be celebrated when possible during the school year but creativity around prayer and ritual should also be encouraged. There are many other ways to pray together and celebrate throughout the school year. When there are school Masses, students of other faiths should always be warmly invited and welcomed but not obliged to attend. They can be invited to approach the altar during communion time with their hands folded across their chest, for a blessing. It is a very enriching experience to have students of other faiths attend and observe our communal celebrations throughout the year and they should know that we value their presence among us.

If a school has a large proportion of students of other faiths in a graduating year, the possibility of an inter-religious ceremony could be considered as well as the Graduation Mass.

Prayer Services within the school can also be inter-religious.<sup>13</sup> A good example of this is at a time of death or in commemorating the dead in November. It is informative for the rest of the school to understand how other cultures remember their dead and to have that respect promoted within the school.

It may be appropriate to acknowledge some of the **major feasts of other traditions**, especially those of students in your school. This could be done in the following ways:

- ▶ Encouragement and awareness of students who are fasting for religious reasons. The school community should be aware that they are fasting and why. These students should be supported and commended for their spiritual practice. This could be acknowledged during assembly or on the school intercom.
- ▶ Some pictures of a religious festival in the foyer of the school or on a notice board as it is being celebrated.
- ▶ Reference to different major festivals during year-group assemblies.

This can only benefit the school community as well as foster an attitude of welcome to all. An interfaith calendar is available at <http://www.interfaith.org>. This lists the sacred times and dates of all of the major religious traditions, including Catholicism. See also Appendix B for suggestions of some of the important festivals in other traditions that could be acknowledged in Catholic schools.

**N.B. This approach is only appropriate if the feast days, festivals and seasons of the Christian calendar are clearly and prominently acknowledged and celebrated also. Otherwise the characteristic spirit of the school is compromised.**

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<sup>12</sup> Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, *Vision 08*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix C for a sample interfaith prayer service that could be used in schools.





Oatlands College, Dublin

Truly I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who reveres him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Acts 10:34)

God has told you what is good and what is required of you, only this: Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

## Sacred Space

All Catholic schools, where possible, should consider setting up a sacred space or prayer room in their school. The prayer room should have contemporary images and symbols from the Christian tradition and a focus on the Bible in the room. It is a matter of debate for each school whether they want the Blessed Sacrament to be present in the room. Some schools feel that pupils do not understand or respect the implications of having the Blessed Sacrament present. Others believe that is the precise reason to have it there and to bring the pupils to an understanding of its presence.<sup>14</sup>

Pupils and staff of any tradition should be welcome to pray in the school's prayer room. Depending on the numbers of students of other faiths present in a school, it needs to be decided whether the prayer room is considered to be a specifically Catholic place of worship or a place of welcome for those of all faiths. A prayer space in a Catholic school could acknowledge other faiths in the prayer room. This could be done in the following ways:

- ▶ Prayer mats, small cushions and chairs provided in the room to cater for people's different styles of praying.
- ▶ Including the symbols from other faith traditions in the room. This could be done in one area of the room, designated as the interfaith corner. Images of the Buddha, the Jewish Menorah (candelabra) and the Qur'an, for example, could be placed in this interfaith space. Quotations from Scripture could be placed in this space; for example:

**N.B. The use of images in the prayer room can be problematic for some religious traditions. This will be looked at in the next section.**



## Religious Imagery in the School

Religious images and symbols appropriate to a contemporary understanding of a Catholic school should be placed in prominent areas around the school. Schools should examine their use of religious imagery in the school and how well it speaks to students in a contemporary context – many statues are dated and neglected in dark corners of the school.

Mindful of the need to avoid symbols for the sake of symbols, pupils could be engaged in **choosing or creating symbols** which they feel best reflect their relationship with God. Contemporary Catholic imagery, posters, crucifixes and sculptures are widely available in Veritas stores and Cathedral Books or online and may be more appropriate than some of the traditional imagery that has been in a school for decades.

<sup>14</sup> If a school wishes to create a prayer room and host the Blessed Sacrament, they need to contact their Bishop first.

Pupils of other faiths could also be invited to display art/icons of their faith around the time of their major feasts. However, difficulty may arise for students of some religious traditions around the use of imagery and iconography. Muslims make no recourse to imagery or icons whatsoever and find images of prophets or God offensive. Jehovah's Witnesses strongly believe that the Old Testament clearly states that statues and icons should not be used in worship. Similarly, some Protestant traditions do not advocate the use of statues in sacred places and during worship.

However, this is an example of where a Catholic school has a distinctive characteristic. Catholic worship and sacred spaces are very visual spaces, appealing to our senses and are a distinctive feature of our religious tradition. People of any tradition are welcome to pray in a Catholic space but if they wish imagery or icons to be removed it needs to be explained that this would be equally offensive to the Catholic tradition.

The Mission Statement and Charter for a school should also be displayed prominently in the school, as well as relevant iconography representing the founder or ethos of the school. This places value on our heritage and belonging to a wider network of Catholic schools.

## Retreats

Retreats can also be a spiritual experience for all and should seek to include all students. This could be done by encouraging an awareness of the spiritual in their lives and teaching them about the different forms of prayer, rather than exposing them solely to sacramental experiences. Provided we are already grounded in our own faith, we can understand our faith better when we encounter another religion and it can be very enriching for students to experience and respect one another's prayer practices.

## Pupil Uniform

**No pupil or staff member should be prevented from wearing a religious symbol or garment** in accordance with their tradition, for example, the *hijab* for Muslim girls and the *turban* for Sikh boys. Freedom of religious expression is a basic human right<sup>15</sup> and is in keeping with the Catholic understanding of its identity as being a universal Church.

On the other hand, the wearing of a full veil over a girl's face (*niqab*), for example, is a more challenging issue. It would be unsatisfactory for a teacher not to be able to see and engage properly with a pupil whose face was covered. The full veil on girls in Irish schools is a rare enough occurrence and as such may need to be negotiated between the parents and principal. If a female principal or teacher is meeting with a female student or mother who is fully veiled in the *niqab*, it is reasonable to ask them to uncover their face for the meeting if you wish, but only on the understanding that no man will enter the room during the meeting.

**N.B. Any difficulty with uniform needs to be resolved before the pupil is admitted. One of the advantages of meeting parents of incoming pupils upon enrolment is the opportunity to make clear that full uniform includes the school crest, which may include a Cross or other Christian symbols.**



**15** Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' (Article 18)

## Background Information on Other Religious Traditions

### Islam in Ireland

The Muslim Community in Ireland can be traced back to the early 1950s. On 23 January 1959 the first Muslim assembly in Ireland was held at Koinonia House in Dublin, where a vote was taken to form the first Muslim Committee in Ireland, known as The Dublin Islamic Society. This date marked the first printing of the Muslim fasting timetable and the commencement of regular performance of Friday prayer in Ireland.

When the Muslim population in Ireland increased to reach 100, Muslims perceived themselves as a viable community. They began to pursue the establishment of an Islamic Centre, incorporating a prayer hall with facilities for ablution and an Islamic library. Due to the rapid increase of the Muslim population in Ireland, the need emerged for an Islamic Centre that could cope with the growing numbers and satisfy their needs in terms of education, socialisation, integration and recreation. In 1992, Sheikh Hamdan Ben Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Governor of Dubai and Minister of Finance and Industry in the United Arab Emirates, agreed to finance a piece of land, including a building, to house the Muslim National School, and later on Sheikh Hamdan agreed to sponsor the construction of a purpose-built mosque and Islamic Centre on the same site.

Construction of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI) began in 1994. On 16 November 1996, the ICCI was officially inaugurated by President Mary Robinson and Sheikh Hamdan Al-Maktoum. The Al-Maktoum Foundation now covers the running costs of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland.



Islamic Cultural Centre, Dublin

It is difficult to get accurate statistics on the current Muslim population in Ireland but according to the 1991 census, the number of Muslims was 3,873. A substantial increase occurred to the Muslim population in 2002. According to the 2002 census, the Muslim population scored 19,147. The present population, according to the last census, is estimated to be 32,000. However, it is believed at present to be over 40,000.

Within the last few decades, the Muslim community has become the fastest growing religious minority within Ireland and has made a considerable contribution to social, economic and inter-religious dialogue in our country.

In terms of education, Muslim families who immigrate to Ireland are challenged to adapt to a European system of education. The existence of a small number of Muslim national schools in Dublin has been a considerable help. However, integration into state second-level schools has brought challenges.



### Food

Muslims eat *halal* food. They do not eat pork and only eat meat that has been slaughtered by people 'of the book', i.e. people from a

monotheistic tradition: Judaism, Christianity or Islam. The only cutlery Muslim students can use is cutlery that is specifically used for Halal food. This can present a challenge for students who wish to use school canteens. The most sensible way around this seems to be to invite students to bring in their own cutlery from home.

Home Economics teachers also need to be sensitive to this issue.



## Prayer

Prayer is central to the daily life of Muslims. They are required to pray five times a day:

- ▶ At sunrise (Fajr)
- ▶ Noon (Zuhr)
- ▶ Late afternoon (Asr)
- ▶ Sunset (Magrib)
- ▶ Evening (Isha)

Muslims do not have to go to a mosque to pray; in fact they can pray anywhere, once they face east towards Mecca. Some Muslim students or their parents may ask if their son or daughter can pray in the school during lunchtime, especially during Ramadan, an important thirty-day period of fasting. If our schools are concerned with the spiritual development of all of our students, there seems no need to deny Muslim students the space to pray, e.g. the prayer room or an empty classroom. However, this room would not be 'allocated' to the Muslim pupils on a permanent basis or become 'their' room. It would simply be a space provided for them to pray in at certain times.

Some schools that are situated near a mosque may be faced with requests from parents for their son or daughter to attend the mosque every Friday afternoon for their communal gatherings. In such cases, the parents should meet with the principal to discuss the implications of missing the same subjects every week or ideally the matter should have been discussed during their enrolment interview.

At the very least, a letter needs to be provided from parents permitting their daughter or son to be released from school to attend the mosque and ideally they should return to school afterwards (approximately 2 p.m.).



## Curriculum Difficulties for Muslims

### Sex Education

The concern most Muslim parents have in the area of sex education is not whether sex education is taught or not, but rather with the moral framework or context in terms of methodology and content and the assumptions that may underpin the teaching of it.

Islamic parents prefer to provide guidance about sexual behaviour and the way in which men and women should relate to each other to their children at home, and often prefer that their child does not attend Sex Education class, as is their right. Schools should inform parents when Sex Education is to be taught and provide an opportunity for parents to view all the resources to be used, with the option of withdrawing their child from class.

### Music

Participation in music class is seldom a problem for Islamic pupils. There is a great diversity of opinion regarding music amongst Muslims. These are often influenced by local cultures and varying religious interpretations. Traditionally, music is limited to the human voice and non-tuneable percussion instruments such as drums.

The concern from Muslims is often about 'modern' pop music that may include obscene language, encourage or promote sexual or violent behaviour or encourage the consumption of intoxicants and drugs. It is important to explain to Muslim parents who wish to withdraw their son or daughter from Music class that such pop songs are not part of the music syllabus. The music curriculum is very varied, teaching composition, the history of western music, different musical styles and genres, performance and Irish music. Students do not necessarily learn pop songs and for their practical exam (musical performance), there is no reason why a Muslim student or group of students cannot sing some Islamic texts and use a drum.

If music is compulsory in a school in First Year or right up to Junior Cert, Muslim parents should be informed of this before they decide to enrol their son or daughter in the school. It may not be possible to withdraw their son or daughter from music class due to issues of supervision. However, under Section 30 (2)(e) of the Education Act (1998), the Minister shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years.



### Physical Education (PE)

Generally speaking, Muslim girls are not encouraged to partake in sports that involve physical contact with the opposite sex. It is acceptable for boys to partake in sports that involve physical contact (e.g. football, basketball) but not against girls.

Concern also arises around swimming and the PE uniform for girls. If a short skirt is worn for sports, some Muslim girls may wish to wear a tracksuit underneath the skirt, in the interests of modesty. Swimming can cause much concern. Muslim girls would be concerned about wearing bikinis and sometimes even a swimsuit. The Islamic Cultural Centre suggests a short wet suit as an alternative for girls and requests that girls and boys do not swim together. They also feel strongly that security cameras should be switched off to guarantee the privacy of women.

Sports practised in the presence of the same sex only do not require the wearing of the *hijab*. This is important to note, especially for sports such as basketball, when the *hijab* could actually be pulled and harm the girl.

### Evangelical Christians in Ireland

Evangelical Christianity is a useful term to describe the arrangement of mainline Protestant Churches and the new independent Churches practising in Ireland.

Evangelical Christianity is not a denomination in the way that Methodism or Catholicism is. Instead, it is a broad alignment of Churches based more on beliefs and practices than on organisations. Evangelicals, regardless of their denomination, tend to hold four emphases in common. They are:

- **Conversion:** Placing a high value on an individual's personal experience of God leading to transformation.
- **The Bible:** Placing the Bible in a position of supreme authority.
- **Activists:** A desire to share their faith in word and deed.
- **The Cross:** The centre of evangelical theology and practice is the Cross of Jesus.

Evangelicalism in Ireland is often understood purely as an expression of Protestantism but there is a movement of Roman Catholics who consider themselves evangelical, and there are few evangelicals that would welcome the description of 'Protestant'. To further complicate things, evangelical Christianity in Ireland today is not to be confused with the kind of evangelicalism that one might encounter in Northern Ireland or the United States of America. In Ireland it is more ethnically diverse and less culturally conservative.



So what do you need to know about Evangelicalism in Ireland? It has experienced ongoing significant growth over the last fifteen years. In part, this is caused by an influx of immigrants from evangelical backgrounds but also from a relatively large number of Irish Catholics who have become disillusioned with their faith, and have rediscovered their faith in an evangelical setting.

The fact that evangelicals are a minority religion, in part because they have so many immigrants in their midst and in part because of a theological commitment to engagement, evangelical Christian students in Ireland are likely to be well acquainted with their own faith and school is less likely to be the primary source of religious formation. While Irish evangelicals may hold distinctive theological beliefs, for the large part they are not likely to be at variance with the daily running of a Catholic school. Most differences lie in dogmatic, theological matters.

Their families and local church are the prime sites of catechesis and so most parents will tend to see religion class and religious activities at school as an added bonus, an anthropological curiosity or simply another academic subject to be engaged in. There are of course strands of fundamentalism within the movement as in any other religious grouping and this often comes down to individuals and their personal convictions.

## Jehovah's Witnesses in Ireland

All Jehovah's Witnesses are keen Bible students and differ from other Christian religions in their interpretation of Scripture. They firmly believe in their commission to help others to come to acknowledge what they understand as truth, but also respect the fundamental right of all to believe as they wish.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in the Bible as the Word of God and consider its sixty-six books to be inspired directly by God and to be historically accurate. They endeavour to improve their ability to explain Bible teachings to others. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses usually tend to express themselves very well due to conscientious study and regular attendance at Bible meetings.

### Rituals and Celebrations

The differences in belief between Catholicism and Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly reflected in their form of worship and particularly in response to customs and practices that they consider to be of un-Christian origin.

### Birthdays

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays. They believe it to be a secular custom that has no mention or foundations in the Bible. 'Although considered to be a harmless secular custom today, birthday celebrations are actually rooted in paganism.'<sup>16</sup>

Parents of Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to buy gifts for their children during the year rather than celebrating the day of their birth.



<sup>16</sup> Watch Tower Bible and Trust Society of Britain (2006), *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education*, p. 15.



### **Christmas**

Jesus' birthday is unknown and was set as 25 December during the fourth century. At that time, this was the date of the winter solstice festival called the 'Birth of the Sun' because the sun appeared to grow stronger as the days became longer once again. This day was chosen to replace the pagan festival with the celebration of the light that broke forth into the world through Christ and the symbolism of the *Sol Invictus* was transferred to Christ.

However, the early Christians did not celebrate Christmas and there is no Biblical evidence for it. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas or accept presents on this day. It is understood as a secular custom.

### **Halloween**

Halloween also causes difficulties for Jehovah's Witnesses and other evangelical groups that place strong emphasis on Scripture. They consider it to be another pagan ritual that promotes false worship. In Deuteronomy 18:10-13, the Old Testament is very clear that the faithful should avoid 'bad spirits' and 'spells and omens'.



### **Worship**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Sacraments. However they do practise Adult Baptism and acknowledge Easter because Jesus said very clearly in Scripture to '... Do this in memory of me ...'.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not use any form of imagery or icon in their worship as they believe the second commandment clearly forbids it. If you visit the places where they meet, known as Kingdom Halls, you will find neither icons of saints nor statues of Jesus or Mary. There are also issues around praying to saints or anyone except God.

### **Religious Education**

Jehovah's Witnesses parents differ conscientiously in minor matters as to what they will allow their children to be involved in. They generally appreciate the high moral ethos of Catholic schools. Some parents may have no difficulty with their children participating in religious education, once it is not catechetical in nature, but others might have great difficulty with this.

It is important for Catholic schools to be sensitive to the fact that the three aforementioned religious groupings all resist religious imagery and hold the word of God as paramount. Difficulties may arise around devotion to Mary with Evangelical or Protestant students as well as with Jehovah's Witnesses.

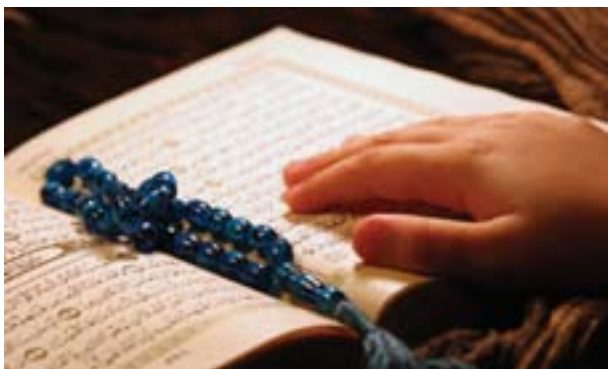
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## Funerals and Commemorations of the Dead in Different Faith Traditions

When there is a death in the school community, it would be usual to contact the bereaved family to express the school's condolences and to discuss the most appropriate response for the school. This is very important when the deceased is from another faith tradition.<sup>17</sup>

### Islamic Funerals

Muslims bury the body of the deceased within twenty-four hours. The deceased is placed with their head facing the Muslim holy city of Mecca. The body is then ritually washed. They prefer this ritual to be performed by family or close friends rather than by hospital staff or undertakers. Male relatives will wash male bodies and female relatives will wash female bodies.



After the ritual washing, the body is wrapped in a shroud that is usually white. The *salat* for the dead, *salat ul janaza*, is then performed. This takes the form of the usual Muslim daily *salat* prayers with some special additions which specifically relate to death. The ceremony usually takes place in the family home and is led either by someone the deceased chose before their death, a close relative or the family Imam.



It is forbidden to cremate the body of a Muslim. Muslims are buried with their face turned to the right, facing Mecca and may be removed from the coffin when placed in this position in the grave. Members of the funeral party throw a little earth onto the grave while reciting 'We created you from it, and return you into it, and from it we will raise you a second time' (Qur'an, Surah 20:55).

Gravestones are kept simple, marked only by the deceased's name and date of death. Many Muslims will spend money on the poor rather than on an elaborate memorial stone. Official mourning lasts for three days and includes a banquet to remember the deceased. On the third day relatives visit the grave and recite extracts from the Qur'an.

### Sikh Funerals

Sikhs view death as a separation of the soul from the body and consider it part of God's will. Sikhs believe that the soul moves on to meet the supreme soul, God. Death is seen as a time for praising God in accordance with the teachings of their code of conduct, the *Rahit Maryada*. After someone dies, if the body is on a bed it should not be moved and no light should be placed next to it. Prayers are said which acknowledge that the death is an act of God.

Sikh scriptures state that relatives should not indulge in wailing and anguish, although this is, naturally, hard. Hymns are sung in preparation for the cremation of the body. The family read the Holy Book continuously for forty-eight hours or in stages which must be completed within one week and end on the day of the funeral.

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<sup>17</sup> This information has been adapted from <http://www.staffspastrack.org.uk/exhibit/ilm/default.htm>

Cremation is the accepted form of disposal of the body. The body is bathed and dressed in fresh clothes. Hymns that induce a feeling of detachment are sometimes sung on the way to the crematorium, to aid the family in not showing their grief. At the crematorium, the prayer known as the *Kirtan Sohila* is often recited. *Ardas*, or 'general prayers' are often said before cremation as well. These seek a blessing for the departing soul. A member of the family will then light the funeral pyre or push the button for the coffin to disappear.

Men wear black headscarves to the funeral and women wear pale coloured or white headscarves. Ashes are collected and scattered in running water or on the sea. Sikhs do not hold any river as holy but may deposit the ashes in a place of sentimental value. After the cremation, guests return to the family home and readings are given and hymns sung. Everyone must bathe as soon as they go home to cleanse themselves.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks. On the first anniversary of the person's death, the family gathers and undertakes *Barsi* prayer. They then have a meal. This is not a sad occasion but is seen as a way of remembering the deceased and celebrating their life.



### **Jewish Funerals**

Jewish people are buried in the ground. If possible, a handful of dust from Israel is placed in the grave or coffin. The funeral service consists of psalms, speeches praising the deceased, prayers for the repose of the soul and the final recital of the *Kaddish*, a hymn to praise God.

After the funeral, the mourners eat a simple meal prepared by friends or neighbours. In Orthodox families the next of kin will tear their upper garments and remain indoors for seven days (the *shivah*) sitting on low stools.

Mourning can last for one month or one year. These stages of return to normal life of the mourners reflect the soul's gradual progress to the afterlife.

### **Hindu Funerals**

Hindus believe in reincarnation and view death as the soul moving from one body to the next on its path to reach Nirvana, or heaven. Death is a sad occasion but Hindu priests emphasise the route ahead for the departed soul and a funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service.

Hindus cremate their dead, believing that the burning of a dead body signifies the release of the spirit and that the flames represent Brahma, the creator.



Family members will pray around the body as soon as possible after death. People avoid touching the corpse as it is considered unclean. The corpse is usually bathed and dressed in white traditional Indian clothes. If a wife dies before her husband, she is dressed in red bridal clothes. If a woman is a widow she will be dressed in white or pale colours.

The funeral procession may pass places of significance to the deceased, such as a building or street. Prayers are said here and at the entrance to the crematorium.



The body is decorated with sandalwood, flowers and garlands. Scriptures are read from the *Vedas* or *Bhagavad Gita*. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or male, will light some kindling and circle the body, praying for the well-being of the departing soul.

After the cremation, the family may have a meal and offer prayers in their home. Mourners wash and change completely before entering the house after the funeral. A priest will visit and purify the house with spices and incense. This is the beginning of the thirteen-day mourning period when friends will visit and offer their condolences.

Often, a garland of dried or fake flowers is placed around a photograph of the deceased to show respect for their memory.

*Shradh* is practised one year after the death of the person. This can either be an annual event or a large one-off event. This is the Hindu practice of giving food to the poor in memory of the deceased. A priest will say prayers for the deceased and during this time, usually lasting one month, the family will not buy any new clothes or attend any parties.

Sons are responsible for carrying out *Shradh*.

### **Buddhist Funerals**

Funerals are relatively unimportant in Buddhism. Buddhists concentrate their efforts on the deceased's frame of mind up to, and at the moment of, death. Most Buddhist funerals held in the west are simple and low-key affairs organised by family and friends. They include appropriate Buddhist readings and tributes to the deceased.

The final committal is usually carried out at a chapel attached to the cemetery, preferably with overtly Christian symbols concealed. Most Buddhists prefer cremation.



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## Conclusion

Mutual understanding and mutual respect between management and parents, teachers and students is of vital importance as we move forward as a pluralist society. It is up to each one of us to inform ourselves about these different religious traditions and approach them with sensitivity and understanding while at the same time holding fast to the characteristic spirit of the Catholic school and the school's Charter for education.

In the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterise different civilisations.<sup>18</sup>



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**18** The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977), *The Catholic School*, par. 85.

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## Recommendations

The following key recommendations are made in this document to further improve the inclusive nature of the Catholic School:

- 1** The Catholic ethos of the school needs to be explained to all parents prior to enrolment in the school. Any difficulty with the school uniform or Religious Education or any other subject should be discussed and resolved before the student is admitted.
- 2** Subjects such as music, PE and RSE should also be discussed with parents from different religious backgrounds prior to enrolment.
- 3** It is important to allay any parental fears about proselytising in the Catholic school. Parents should be informed that the Religious Education syllabi are open to all faiths and no faith.
- 4** It should also be made clear that their son or daughter will be experiencing the values and ethos of the school in the day-to-day running of the school, not just in RE class.
- 5** All students are encouraged to grow in their own faith or spirituality, whether it is Catholic or not.
- 6** A student of a different denomination cannot insist that religious instruction in that denomination be provided.
- 7** Withdrawal from Religious Education can present a difficulty for the Catholic school, as Religious Education is at the heart of its enterprise. However, students who are withdrawn from formal Religious Education classes can be asked to use these classes to explore their own faith tradition or some philosophical text, rather than doing their homework.
- 8** If there is a large cohort of students of a particular faith tradition, it would be respectful and hospitable to invite ministers or leaders from that faith community into the school during RE times to meet with pupils from that faith. This would emphasise a spirit of welcome and inclusiveness but is at the discretion of the school.
- 9** Recognition of some of the festivals from different religions is appropriate in the Catholic school, provided that the festivals and seasons of the Christian calendar are clearly and prominently acknowledged and celebrated also.
- 10** Depending on the numbers of students of other faiths present in a school, it needs to be decided whether a prayer room is considered to be a specifically Catholic place of worship or a place of welcome for those of all faiths.
- 11** If a school has a large proportion of students of other faiths in a graduating year, the possibility of an inter-religious ceremony could be considered, as well as the Graduation Mass.
- 12** No pupil or staff member should be prevented from wearing a religious symbol or garment.



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# Appendix A

## National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus

### Aims of Religious Education

- 1 To foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, of all ages and at all times.
- 2 To explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion.
- 3 To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on personal lifestyle, inter-personal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts.
- 4 To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life.
- 5 To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student.

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## Appendix B

### Religious Festivals Calendar for the Major World Religions

The following are some of the Religious Festivals from other faith traditions that may be appropriate to highlight during your school year:

#### Islam

- ▶ **Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr:** A thirty-day period of fasting with celebration at the end. The celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* involves family meals and the exchanging of gifts. *Ramadan* and *Eid* occur during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar.
- ▶ **Eid al-Ah.ha:** Islamic festival ending the annual Mecca pilgrimage. This occurs at the end of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

#### Buddhism

- ▶ **Buddhist New Year:** The date depends on the country of origin to which the student belongs. Chinese New Year is generally in late January, while students from South-East Asia celebrate their New Year in April.
- ▶ **Vesak:** The major Buddhist festival of the year, it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the *Buddha* on the one day. It is celebrated on the first full moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June.

#### Judaism

- ▶ **Passover:** Celebrating the Exodus; usually occurs close to the Christian dates of Easter, sometime in April.
- ▶ **Rosh Hashanah:** Jewish New Year, generally around September.
- ▶ **Yom Kippur:** The Day of Atonement, also in late September.
- ▶ **Hanukkah:** Festival of Lights in December.

#### Hinduism and Sikhism

- ▶ **Diwali:** This is the Festival of Lights which lasts for five days. For many Hindus and Sikhs, *Diwali* is also New Year's Eve.

See [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org) for the exact dates of these festivals each year.



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# Appendix C

## Sample Interfaith Prayer Service

### Exploring Other Faiths: A Class Liturgy

At the moment we are all exploring the Islamic/Jewish/Buddhist faith in Religion Class. This is opening our eyes to the many similarities and differences that Christians and Muslims/Jews share. Faith is a phenomenon found in every age and region of the world. It helps us to make sense of life and sustains us during times of difficulty. As Christians, we are called to respect and seek to understand other religions, and in so doing deepen our relationship with God.

**Hymn:** Bind us Together, Lord.

A reading from the Book of Genesis (9:12-13)

God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and earth.

This is the word of the Lord.

### Prayer

A rainbow has many colours,  
a mountain has many valleys,  
a river has many bends  
and this is what gives them  
their beauty and their differences.

And every face is new, exciting, different.  
Everyone's feelings and  
convictions are their own.  
And we accept differences  
in people as in nature.

Differences might mean conflict,  
and there will be times  
when we struggle  
for understanding and sympathy,  
for patience and for dialogue,  
for oneness in loving diversity,  
for tolerance with those we dislike.

Lord, help us to always be open  
and accepting of difference.  
Strengthen our faith  
and help us recognise that we are one  
human family.

Amen.



## The Story of the Rainbow

**NARRATOR:** Once upon a time the colours of the world started to quarrel; each claimed that they were the best, the most important, the favourite.

**GREEN** said, 'Clearly I am the most important. I am the sign of life and of hope. I was chosen for grass, trees, leaves and plants. Without me, all animals would die. Look over the countryside and you will see that I am in the majority.'

**BLUE** interrupted. 'You only think about the earth, but consider the sky and the sea. I am the colour of water. Without water there would be no life. The sky gives space and peace. Without my peace, you would be nothing but busybodies.'

**YELLOW** chuckled, 'You are all so serious. I bring laughter, warmth and happiness into the world. The sun is yellow, the moon is yellow, the stars are yellow. Without me, life would be dull and depressing.'

**ORANGE** started to blow her trumpet. 'I am the colour of health and strength. I carry all the most important vitamins necessary for good health. Think of oranges, strawberries and carrots. I may be scarce, but I am precious. I don't hang around all the time, but when I fill the sky at sunrise or sunset, my beauty is so striking that no one gives another thought of you!'

**RED** could stand it no longer. He shouted out, 'I am the ruler of all of you, blood, life's blood! I am the colour of danger and of bravery. I am willing to fight for a cause. I am the colour of passion and of love. Think of the red rose.'

**PURPLE** rose up to his full height. He was very tall and spoke with great pomp. 'I am the colour of power and authority. Kings and bishops have always chosen me, for I am the sign of wisdom and authority. People do not question me – they listen and obey.'

**INDIGO** spoke much more quietly than all the others: 'Think of me. I am the colour of silence. You hardly notice me at all but without me you all become superficial. I represent thought and reflection. You need me for quiet, silence and inner peace.'

**NARRATOR:** And so the colours went on boasting, each convinced that they were the best. Their quarrelling became louder and louder. Suddenly, there was a flash of brilliant white lightning. Thunder rolled and boomed. Rain started to pour down relentlessly. The colours all crouched down in fear, drawing close to one another for comfort.

**RAIN** then spoke: 'You foolish colours, fighting amongst yourselves, each trying to dominate the rest. Don't you know that you were each made for a special purpose, unique and different? God cares for you all. He wants you all. Join hands with one another and come with me. He will stretch you across the sky in a great bow of colour, as a sign that you can live together in peace. You are a sign of hope for tomorrow.'

**NARRATOR:** And so, whenever God washes the earth with rain, he puts a rainbow in the sky. When we see the rainbow may we remember to appreciate one another and love one another.



## Together We Pray:

**Green earth.** We pray that we may grow to appreciate and protect our green earth that God has given us.

**Battles.** We pray for an end to the war and the many battles that plague the Middle East.

**Why Lord.** Why the suffering, the violence, the many vicious crimes in our society. Help us to be peaceful agents of your presence in the world.

**The Elderly.** We pray for the elderly in our society. May we continue to value their years of experience by keeping in touch with our elderly relatives.

**Rulers.** We pray for the leaders of our country, May they always care for and protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our land.

**Parents.** We pray that God may continue to protect our parents. We thank them for the life they have given us.

In the silence of our own hearts we pray for our own special intentions.

*Pause for silent reflection*

Whatever life brings, we should, like the Jews, trust in God.

Whatever we suffer, we should, like the Buddhists, find acceptance there.

In every situation, we should, like the Muslims, bear witness to God.

As Christians, we should always remember Christ's promise of eternal happiness.

As we explore different expressions of faith with respect, openness and wonder, we ask God to bless our journey and help us connect with one another.

**Taizé Hymn:** *Jubilate Deo*

## Final Blessing

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.

Amen.







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