The Pastor and the Parish School

Rights and Duties of the Pastor in Relation to the Parish School

Archdiocese of Brisbane
THE significance of collaborative and participative ministry is well recognized and valued within the Archdiocese of Brisbane. The need for this and the exemplary form in which it is typified, is seen in the important and close links between the pastor and the parish school.

This document on the role of the pastor and the parish school promotes the development of understanding about the mission of the parish school and the associated responsibilities of parties which support and serve its needs. The attempt to outline the critical issues is welcomed within our local church community. Delineation of a clearer understanding of the rights and duties of the pastor in relation to the parish school can only enhance the effective collaboration already occurring.

I wish to thank all parties involved with the completion of the document. I would particularly acknowledge the initiative of the Priests’ Council and the Executive of Brisbane Catholic Education in commissioning the paper and the working party which gave concrete form to their vision. It is my hope that the document will be useful to pastors and those with whom they collaborate in the context of parish school ministry. I commend it to all for careful examination and discussion and pray that it will enhance the practice of cooperative ministry within the church of Brisbane.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this document is to express the policy of the Archdiocese of Brisbane concerning the role of the Pastor in regard to the Parish School.

The subtitle of this booklet *Rights and Duties of the Pastor in relation to the Parish School* points to the genesis of the document. In late 1989 the priests of the Archdiocese met with the Executive of Brisbane Catholic Education to consider the role of the priest in the Catholic school. The group made a joint resolution to convene a committee to review and develop a paper on the role of the pastor in the parish school.

The Committee, comprising parents, parish priests, a Canon lawyer, principals and Catholic Education Centre personnel, was convened early in 1990. In consultation with the Council of Priests and parish priests the Committee drafted a paper which was distributed to all schools and parishes in September 1991. This distribution was accompanied with the request for discussion of the document in local communities and for forwarding of responses to the Committee.

The contents of the document reflect both its sources and the outcomes of consultations that accompanied its development. The document addresses only those areas of rights and duties which emerged during the consultation process as most in need. Consequently, the paper does not cover all aspects of the pastoral relationship between pastor and school.

This resource is addressed to Pastors and Parish School Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils, Parents and Friends Associations and School Boards in the Archdiocese of Brisbane.
PREAMBLE

PASTOR

The role of the parish priest or pastor with regard to the parish school has a long history, and is defined in Church law, local policy and custom. Brisbane Catholic Education, combining as it does the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office and a necessary administrative structure for the diocesan school system, is, in comparison, relatively recent in origin.

The pastor is the priest to whom the diocesan bishop has entrusted the pastoral care of the parish (canon 515 §1). Under the authority of the diocesan bishop, and in accord with the norm of law, he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, with the co-operation of other priests or deacons and the assistance of the lay Christian faithful (canon 519). The pastor as leader of the local faith community, and the Catholic school as an important institution within that community, have a particular and related role in the saving mission of Christ.

The pastor is called to recognise the special character of the Church’s communion and to empower those with other recognised duties and charisms to fulfil and exercise them. In parish schools the pastor will act in ways appropriate to this role. He will offer counsel and support in a particular way to the principal who is responsible for educational leadership within the school. In matters which affect the school community he will take steps to ensure that all interested parties are heard before a final decision is taken.

PARISH SCHOOL

The Catholic School has always been an integral part of the pastoral strategy of the local Church of Brisbane. It has an irreplaceable role in handing on the faith from generation to generation.¹

The parish school, therefore, is a significant pastoral initiative for those parishes which have them and as such is integral to parish priorities. The parish school therefore not only shares the mission of the parish but also integrates itself in the parish structures, accepting guidance from parish and Archdiocesan leadership as well as offering challenges¹ to and receiving challenges from the wider community.

¹ Bathersby, Archbishop J., Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education Sunday, 1992
ARCHDIOCESAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

The growth of the Archdiocesan school system in the past twenty years has significantly changed the operation of the school within the parish. What had once been a loose network of self-supporting, relatively autonomous schools, under the control of parish priests and the administration of religious institutes, has gradually been transformed into a school system.

The Archbishop appointed a Catholic Education Council in 1965 to develop appropriate diocesan policy for schools, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s increasingly turned to the Catholic Education Centre for assistance with the ever more complex administrative demands of a modern school system.

While the centralised system has been essential for the efficiency of schools, the preservation of pastoral rights, and the administration of complex systems in a volatile, social, industrial and political environment, it always aims to serve the local faith community to which the school belongs and for which it exists.

SOURCES

This booklet draws on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Code of Canon Law, documents of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Catholic Education Council policy, and current Brisbane Catholic Education practice as its sources.
1. CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

General Principles

Since the Catholic School can be of such service in developing the mission of the People of God and in promoting dialogue between the Church and the country at large to the advantage of both, it is still of vital importance even in our times. (Gravissimum Educationis, n. 8)

The sacred Synod earnestly exhorts pastors of the Church and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools to become increasingly effective, especially in caring for the poor, for those who are without the help and affection of family, and those who do not have the Faith. (Gravissimum Educationis, n. 9)

Archdiocesan Principles and Policy

The Catholic School has always been an integral part of the pastoral strategy of the local Church of Brisbane. It has an irreplaceable role in handing on the faith from generation to generation.

The Catholic School strives to prepare students for successful entry into the world of work or further education, and to be worthy citizens. But it strives more to form them as Christians who, in their family life, in their work and in their neighbourhood, will have the knowledge and skills to transform society into a more just and peaceful world for all.

In the Archdiocese of Brisbane, the general principle is that every parish has its own school. The provision of secondary schooling has involved partnership among religious institutes, parishes and Brisbane Catholic Education.

Role of the Pastor

While having the duty and right common to all the Christian faithful to ensure the spread of the message of salvation to the whole human family, the pastor has a proper and serious duty to provide for the catechesis of the Christian people so that the faith becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living (canon 773).

The pastor carries out this proper and serious duty open to the legitimate diversity of understandings of ecclesiology, Catholicity and evangelisation.

He acts to create an environment in the school where pastor, principal, parents, staff and students understand, respect and support one another in their varying roles and responsibilities, and so give true witness to the values of the Catholic faith.
He acts always aware of his own serious duty, the authentic aims of Catholic Education, and decision-making processes that reflect commitment to belief in the Holy Spirit’s presence in each person.

Today the demand for education in Catholic schools is as strong as ever. However, the motives for this are increasingly mixed and the pastor needs to ensure that people are educated to the authentic purpose of the Catholic school. He sees to it that parents, staff, children and the wider faith community understand the proper role of the school and ensures that role is integrated into the strategic planning and pastoral activity of the parish.

For policy regarding enrolment of children from other Christian traditions, other faiths, or those with no religious affiliation see *Enrolment Procedures*.

**Formation of Teachers**

For the Catholic school to achieve its authentic aim, to create an atmosphere of shared faith where parents, teachers and students come together in prayer and action to live the gospel of Jesus, there is urgent and on-going need for the spiritual and theological formation of those charged with leading and teaching in the school system.

The pastor has a significant role in the task of formation through student-free days, teacher in-service and informal discussions with teachers.

**Review of Structures and Programs**

Accountability calls schools to a regular review of structures and programs to ensure that the rapidly changing needs of students and the community are being addressed in a manner that is true to the gospel. Policies have been developed to guide and assist schools in these challenging tasks. The primary responsibility for the implementation of these policies rests with the principal, but the principal will seek the collaboration of the pastor regarding the implementation of these policies.

**Policy Development**

The pastor collaborates with school personnel, particularly through a school or parish board, in developing policy that is consistent with the authentic aims of the Catholic school.

**Religious Education Program Development**

The pastor collaborates with school personnel in the development and implementation of a religious education program that, guided by diocesan policy, meets the particular needs of the school community.
2. ESTABLISHING, MODIFYING AND CLOSING SCHOOLS

Establishing, modifying or closing of schools are issues for local and Archdiocesan authorities. They are guided by Archdiocesan policies and require a process of collaboration and consultation at and between the local and system levels. This ensures ownership of the undertaking by the local faith community and assures the Archbishop that all relevant issues and concerns are considered. Of particular relevance is the Catholic Education Council policy document, *The Opening, Modification and Closure of Systemic Schools*.

The pastor is responsible for the overall development of the parish school facility. His responsibilities include:

- To organize consultation processes to consider the project as a whole (see below).
- To make necessary financial arrangements.
- To obtain the necessary permissions (see below).
- To appoint the design team.
- To let tenders.
- To supervise the overall project.

In this he is supported by advice from Brisbane Catholic Education’s planning, building, financial and educational officers.

Establishing a School

**Role of the Pastor**

The pastor should initiate discussions with members of the local faith community, Brisbane Catholic Education and the Catholic Education Council’s Planning Committee to understand what the project involves and then to put in train the various planning and approval procedures concerning funding, design and implementation.

The policy, *The Opening, Modification and Closure of Systemic Schools*, details the membership and operation of working parties which gather the necessary data and manage the local consultative processes. The pastor may chair the working party or he may choose to delegate this role. The pastor is assisted by Brisbane Catholic Education’s planning personnel with the project, especially in negotiations with various government authorities.

**Plans**

The pastor submits proposed changes to school facilities together with building plans, through the Director of Brisbane Catholic Education, to the Catholic Education Council’s Planning Committee. After approval the Planning Committee forwards the plans, with recommendations, to the Archdiocesan Building Committee.
Permissions
If establishing a school constitutes an act of extraordinary administration the pastor must secure in writing the prior approval of the Archbishop for the project. The Vicar for Administration is the appropriate contact for details of the procedure.

For the dioceses of Australia acts of extraordinary administration are acts of administration by which the diocese would be committed to an annual repayment principal and interest, in excess of 50 cents per capita of Catholic population or $100,000 whichever being the greater.

Modifying a School

Role of the Pastor
The pastor engages, through the working party process, local personnel in considering all local issues relevant for parish and school as for the establishing of a school (see above).

Consultation
The pastor consults the school community through the working party process and, where such bodies exist, the Parish Pastoral Council, the School Board, the Parish Finance Council, the Parents and Friends Association, about the proposed modification.

He, or the delegated chairperson of the working party, informs the local community of the project and invites responses.

He contacts the Brisbane Catholic Education Centre to gain the assistance of the appropriate personnel.

Plans
The pastor submits proposed changes to school facilities together with building plans, through the Director of Catholic Education, to the Catholic Education Council’s Planning Committee. After approval the Planning Committee forwards the plans, with recommendations, to the Archdiocesan Building Committee.

Permissions
If the proposed modification constitutes an act of extraordinary administration, the pastor must secure in writing the prior approval of the Archbishop for the project. The Vicar for Administration is able to assist with details of the procedure.
Closing a school

Role of the Pastor
The pastor, through the working party process, evaluates the implications of the undertaking and sets in motion the consultations required by the policy, The Opening, Modification and Closure of Systemic Schools.

He will arrange with the Director of Brisbane Catholic Education for representatives of that Centre to speak to those people mentioned in the policy as to criteria for the viability of a parish school and the reason(s) closure is being considered.

The pastor, through the working party process, provides the necessary advice, through the Director of Catholic Education, to the Planning Committee of the Catholic Education Council about the proposed closure. The Planning Committee forwards its recommendations to the Catholic Education Council. The Council forwards its recommendations to the Archbishop.

When the Archbishop has accepted that the school is to close, the pastor takes steps to allow the closing to proceed with proper recognition of the grieving and disruption such an undertaking can involve, whilst giving due recognition to the effort the community has put into establishing and maintaining the school.

Consultation
The pastor, through the working party process, consults the school community and, where such bodies exist, the Parish Pastoral Council, the School Board, the Parish Finance Council, the Parents and Friends Association, about the proposed closure.

3. LITURGY

General Principle (Code of Canon Law)
The pastor is to take care that the blessed Eucharist is the centre of the parish assembly of the faithful. He is to strive to ensure that the faithful are nourished by the devout celebration of the sacraments, and in particular that they frequently approach the sacraments of the blessed Eucharist and penance. He is to strive to lead them to prayer, including prayer in their families, and to take a live and active part in the sacred liturgy. Under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, the pastor must direct this liturgy in his own parish, and he is bound to be on guard against abuses (canon 528 §2).
School/Class Liturgies

The pastor is to provide adequate opportunities for school/class liturgy. He is to have a special care for educating the staff in liturgical principles referring them to appropriate documents for celebration of children’s liturgies and ensuring the active involvement of parents in any school liturgical celebration.

Liturgy Planning

The pastor, Assistant to the Principal (Religious Education) and teachers work together to plan liturgy which is appropriate to various occasions and to particular groups.

4. PASTORAL CARE

General Principle  (Code of Canon Law)

To be effective the pastor needs to come to know the teachers and students (canon 529).

Application

The pastor communicates to staff, students and parents that he has a pastoral concern for their needs. He has a particular care for the principal and staff in their roles as catechists and teachers of the faith.

While respecting the obligations of confidentiality, rights to privacy, and due process, pastor, principal and staff share knowledge of matters relevant to their individual roles so they can offer the best care to students and parents.

The pastor works with principal and staff to ensure on-going doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral formation for all members of staff. He should meet regularly with the principal and/or administration team. His frequent visitation to the school is essential.
5. STAFFING ISSUES

General Principle

Staffing issues are a particular concern for the pastor. While he participates in the appointment procedures in the ways set out in the following paragraphs, he assists these processes by regular meetings with the principal and/or Administration Team and by regular visits to the school. He is sensitive to the nature of industrial relations, the proper role of employee Unions, and the responsibilities of the Director of Catholic Education as employer.

Appointment of Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistants to the Principal

In the appointment of all senior management positions in parish schools: Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant to the Principal (Administration), Assistant to the Principal (Religious Education), the pastor is a member of the selection panel which interviews the short list of candidates, selects and recommends to the Director. His signature is required on the statement providing a recommendation for a principal's appointment.

Appointments to Other Positions

For other positions, the pastor or his nominee is consulted by the principal during the process of selection. The pastor may choose to be a member of the selection panel.

Role of the Director of Brisbane Catholic Education

In accordance with State industrial law and Archdiocesan priorities, all new and continuing appointments of school staff are made by the Director of Catholic Education on the recommendation of the school principal. The exception to the above relates to the appointment of graduates from the Australian Catholic University. In this instance, appointments are made by the Director after recommendations from an appointment panel.

Development of Selection Criteria

System-level criteria for positions are established and made available by Brisbane Catholic Education. Consultation occurs with the pastor, parents, staff and the school board in developing additional local criteria for staffing appointments.
Role of the Principal

The principal is responsible for managing the selection process at the local level. This is done in consultation with the pastor (or his nominee) who has the right to be a member of the selection panel.

The principal consults with the pastor regularly in relation to all staffing matters including appointments, promotions, transfers, appraisals, staff development and matters of concern or conflict.

6. FINANCE

General Responsibility of Pastor

The pastor is ultimately responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the school plant and the recurrent budget, exclusive of salaries.

The pastor has responsibility for building development, re-development and significant maintenance of school buildings.

Salaries

Payment of the salaries of teachers and some ancillary staff is the responsibility of Brisbane Catholic Education which collects Commonwealth Grants, State Grants and the Pay Fund Levy from parishes to meet the salary components and central services costs.

Regulations

In the area of Finance there are some regulations set by the Archdiocese in conformity with Canon Law, Archdiocesan policy, Government accountability requirements and Civil Law.

1) The pastor works through his Parish Finance Committee, Parish Pastoral Council and School Board as appropriate to manage the recurrent and capital needs of the school. (canon 1280)

2) Any acquisition or disposal of land by parishes must be approved by the Archdiocesan Property Committee.

3) Any construction project exceeding $10,000 in value must have the approval of the Archdiocesan Building Committee. Building projects in schools should be
submitted through Catholic Education for comment and forwarded to the Archdiocesan Building Committee for consideration.

4) Fees and levies are set by the parish after taking cognisance of Pay Fund Levy and the minimum recommended fees set on an annual basis by the Catholic Education Council.

5) Principals manage the day-to-day financial affairs of the school on behalf of the parish and in accordance with the approved school budget. Principals and pastors are referred to the document *Recommended Procedures for Financial Accounting and Management in Parish Schools* to ensure that appropriate school financial records are kept separate from other parish funds. This assists in accountability to the parish and to external bodies such as the Commonwealth Government which requires an annual audited financial statement relating to the school.

**Annual Budget**

The pastor, in co-operation with the principal and through his parish structures, is responsible for the preparation of an annual budget of receipts and expenditures for the school. This budget is to be published and made available to the school community and parish within the first term of the school year. At that same time, an audited statement of income and expenditure for the previous year is to be presented.

**7. USE AND MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY**

As the plant and equipment of the school belong to the parish, the pastor will ensure that the management and use of these facilities is in accord with school and other pastoral priorities.

School facilities may be used by parish and other bodies with approval of the pastor but always with sensitivity to possible disruption in the school. The pastor, mindful of the principal’s responsibility to secure and maintain the school premises, will give the principal adequate prior notice of any intended use.

It should be noted that school facilities built with Commonwealth Government financial assistance retain a pro-rata government equity for twenty years. Pastors need to take this into consideration in decision-making processes concerning the change of use of such school facilities to non-school use. Repayment of the remaining equity may be required.
8. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

General Principle

Among educational means the Christian faithful should greatly value schools, which are of principal assistance to parents in fulfilling their educational task (canon 791 §1).

However, it is important that parents do not abrogate the responsibility for religious development of their children to schools.

Role of Pastor

Pastors will encourage within parents a sense of community and belonging with the parish and school. They will have a special concern for providing opportunities for parents' on-going education in faith.

Consultation

Consultation with parents is to be part of the decision-making process on matters affecting the education of students. The pastor will work with the principal to ensure adequate structures for this purpose, such as the School Board and Parents and Friends Association, are operational within the school and to ensure parents are aware of their existence. A key role of the pastor is to unite these structures in vision and purpose.

9. SCHOOL BOARD

General Principle

The board is a policy-making body approved by the Bishops of Queensland. The board assists pastor, parents and staff to work together in providing Catholic education within the pastoral goals of the parish. The board develops processes of consultation within the school community in formulating policy and operates on principles of collegiality, collaboration and prayerful discernment. Pre-service and in-service of board members is necessary and system-level support is available for both initial and on-going formation.

Role of Pastor

The pastor relates with the board in three clear roles: spiritual leader, pastoral leader and board member. Further details on the ministry of the pastor in the board are available in the documentation on boards.
10. PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

General Principle

The Parents and Friends Association is an integral part of the school community representing all parents of the school and assisting the principal and pastor. It is not limited in its scope to fund raising, but is involved in the total life of the school.

Each Association operates within the framework of a constitution approved by the Bishops of Queensland. It has objectives which accord with those of the document, *The Catholic School*.

Involvement in Parents and Friends Association management committees requires a commitment to service of others and on-going personal development.

Role of the Pastor

The pastor is an ex officio member of the Parents and Friends Association and is invited to take an active interest in the work of the Association.

11. ENROLMENT PROCEDURES

General Principle

A characteristic of a Christian community is that it is open and welcoming to all who wish to join it. There are various and sometimes unique factors peculiar to a school community which affect enrolment of students.

Role of Pastor

The pastor has the right to interview families who have applied for the enrolment of their children.

Local Policies

Having regard for the guidelines of Brisbane Catholic Education concerning enrolment, local policies on enrolment, developed with the consent of the pastor, are to be documented.
Students other than Catholics

If or when students other than Catholic apply for enrolment the pastor must give his consent either through policy directives or, in the absence of policy, through verbal approval.

Controversial Decisions

The pastor is consulted by the principal in making enrolment decisions on individual cases. The pastor and principal give mutual support in controversial decisions.

Suspension and Expulsion

The pastor must give his consent in decisions concerning the suspension or expulsion of students, and, where possible, is provided information relevant to withdrawal of students. The ultimate decision in respect to suspension rests with the principal and for expulsion with the Director.

12. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Where pastor and principal are at variance over an issue, each is to make a sincere effort to understand the position of the other. A person outside the situation, acceptable to both, may act as mediator to assist in the resolution of the conflict.

If resolution of the situation is not achieved at the local level, the Director of Brisbane Catholic Education is informed in writing of the situation and will seek to initiate a further process of mediation and, if necessary, arbitration.

If these processes fail to resolve the issue, either pastor or principal may appeal to that Auxiliary Bishop who has been delegated by the Archbishop to hear appeals through any structure that he deems appropriate.

13. CONCLUSION

The above principles and procedures are offered to clarify the Rights and Duties of the Pastor in relation to the Parish School. The document integrates Church teaching, current Archdiocesan policy and practice to support parish school ministry which is so integral to the mission of the Church.
Endorsed by

Council of Priests

Brisbane Catholic Education