

Catholic Schools – New models of Trusteeship

Introduction

My topic is *New models of Trusteeship*. Trusteeship means the holding of an enterprise and property in trust with the legal and moral responsibility to use and administer it for its intended purpose. The enterprise of Catholic School provision has been in the Trusteeship of Catholic parishes and Religious congregations for over 170 years but in recent times, this role is being exercised more and more in partnership with lay people. Many congregations are transferring their Trusts to new Trusts or Trust Boards, comprised in whole or in part of lay people and thus new models of Trusteeship are emerging.

Origin of the Catholic School System

However to contextualise this development, it is helpful to take a quick overview of the long history of Catholic School Provision in Ireland. Celtic Monastic schools which dated from the 5th to the 12th. century were centres of great learning and earned for Ireland the title of 'The Island of Saints and Scholars' The early monastic schools gave way to the great European Orders in the C12,(Cistercians, Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans Augustinians Jesuits), which continued to nurture the love of learning A striking aspect of the centuries between the twelfth and the early nineteenth century was that catholic education remained a constant value and reality throughout. The turbulent political situation in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries culminated in the enactment of the Penal laws passed between 1652 and 1728. These Laws contributed greatly to reducing the people to poverty and lack of learning. To be a teacher or a pupil in a Catholic school setting was punishable by imprisonment, expulsion or even execution. Throughout these harrowing times the established Religious Orders stayed with the people. They founded schools or kept schools going secretly. Huge numbers of hedge schools were established which made a tremendous contribution to keeping faith, culture and learning alive.. The Penal Law proscription of Catholic teachers was repealed in 1782 so that by the time emancipation finally came in 1829, there were over 300,000 Catholic pupils attending pay schools under Catholic teachers. Many of these teachers were lay, among them Edmund Rice, Nano Nagle and Catherine McAuley, each of whom later founded religious congregations .but a number of Religious Orders and individual priests also made a significant contribution . However for most children education was out of reach and for poverty-stricken parents education had to take second place in the battle of survival

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Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin was foremost among those who identified lack of education as a major contributory cause of the plight of poor people. Before the Government's move to introduce national education he introduced congregations from France who had experience in providing schools for the poor -the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Fathers, the De La Salle Brothers, the Holy Ghost Fathers in order to establish schools in his diocese. He encouraged the Sisters of Charity, the Loreto Sisters, the Presentation Sisters and the Mercy Sisters to develop free education for Catholics and he invited Edmund Rice to send Christian Brothers to Dublin to provide free or inexpensive education for boys. This period marked the commencement of the specific involvement of the Irish Catholic Church in education, through schooling. Such involvement was based on a strong commitment to justice for poor people and on a perception of education as a form of pastoral care permeated in all its aspects by Gospel values. As such schooling provided the opportunity for education for empowerment and for formation in Catholic Faith and values.

This involvement predated the Stanley Education initiative of 1831. Through this initiative the English Government was to facilitate the granting of State aid for the provision of national schools. It was acknowledged, however, that the *National Schools were not so much the schools of the government as of local Patrons and Managers who would submit voluntarily to certain regulations in order to entitle them to receive aid from the Government* It was the State's intention to operate a non-denominational system but from the start much unease on the part of all the main churches led to much controversy and gradually resulted in increasing denominationalism throughout the nineteenth century and the subsequent growth of a primary school system which made available public funding for schools provided and managed by Church agencies. Today there are approximately 3000 primary schools in the country under Catholic patronage and management. A number of these schools are called special schools providing services for children who have particular learning or physical disabilities. A number of Gaelscoileanna are also included in this provision.

In a recent document *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future*, the Irish Bishop's Conference recognised that in a growing pluralist society, there is need for more choice and greater diversity of provision within a national education system and it stated its belief that parents who desire schools under their preferred patronage should, as far as possible, be facilitated in accessing them. The Bishops have stated on several occasions that the Church has no desire to be the sole provider of education and when the wishes of parents dictate will

play its part to assure the type of school that most appropriately meets the needs of parents and children. Research published in April 2008 by the Council for Research and Development of the Bishop's Conference established that of the Catholic parents surveyed now choosing Catholic schools, 50.2% would continue to do so if all types of schools were available to them

The Provision of Voluntary Catholic Secondary schools has followed a somewhat different pattern. With the relaxation of the penal laws in the 1780s, Bishops, Religious Congregations and a number of lay people began founding secondary schools without any public funding. The State established no secondary schools and provision was left purely in voluntary hands. While fees were charged, they were often relatively low and some students were admitted to those schools either on scholarships offered by the schools or on waiver of fees. This continued to be the case until the mid 1960s when the state introduced fully funded comprehensive schools and it later developed Community Schools. In 1967 the free education scheme was introduced by the government and the majority (95%) of Voluntary Catholic Secondary schools joined the scheme. The status of the Vocational School was raised to offer full post primary schooling. During the 1970s vocational education authorities became concerned at what they viewed as the erosion of their traditional role in providing non-denominational vocational schools in favour of new community schools. They initiated moves whereby some new schools would come under their control, be run on Community School lines and be termed Community Colleges. Since the 1970s onwards post primary education is provided in a variety of types of schools;

- Catholic Voluntary Secondary School (privately owned and held in trust for the provision of Catholic Education
- Comprehensive Schools (State schools, run by management boards with representatives of different interests groups,
- Community Schools (State schools, run in accordance with a Deed of Trust by management boards representative of different interests groups , including Church and local authorities
- Vocational Schools State schools under the control of local authorities- VEC)
- Community Colleges (State schools under the control of local authorities - VEC)

Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools cater for approximately 55% of the second level cohort of students.

Commitment to Provision of Catholic Schools

The Catholic Church is committed to providing Catholic Schools to cater for the needs of parents who wish their children to have a Catholic education. The distinctive characteristic of the Catholic school is its the Gospel vision of life that underpins its philosophy which is revealed particularly in;

1. The Christian view of the Human Person
2. The understanding of the Catholic school as community,
3. The dialogue between faith and culture that permeates both the curriculum and life of the Catholic School

. The Bishops' Conference, in its Pastoral Letter Vision 08 has set out its understanding of the nature and purpose of the Catholic school and has invited all interested parties into a dialogue about the best ways of ensuring that those schools can develop in the coming decades.

Changes in the Governance of Schools.

The first change in the Trusteeship of Catholic schools came when Trustees began to share the function of management of schools with lay colleagues. For over 140 years, Catholic Primary schools were managed by the local priest or in the case of some convent and monastery schools by religious. Secondary schools were managed by their Trustees. However, inspired by the vision of Vatican 11 that promoted the place of the laity in the ministry of the Church, consideration was given to including lay people in the management of schools. Since the mid 1970s, Boards of Management have become the norm for the management of Catholic Schools at both first and second level. This means that today there are approximately 30 thousand people involved in managing our Catholic schools, nearly 95% whom are lay. When one considers that this is a voluntary service provided for the welfare of our schools and our young people, one cannot but marvel at the commitment and generosity of those who contribute so much to the governance of Catholic schools in Ireland. Such volunteerism is all the more noteworthy at a time when there are budget cuts being made on front line services and when attention is focussing on the management costs of other state provided services. One has only to read the Education Act of 1998 to get a glimpse of the onerous moral and legal responsibility undertaken by Boards, and the extensive work load involved in the leadership, supervision and administrative tasks carried by them. Lay involvement is further enhanced by the fact that the Secretariats of the National Management Boards of Catholic Schools at both primary and post primary levels - CPSMA (Catholic Primary School Management Association) and

AMCSS (Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools) are headed up and entirely staffed by lay professionals.

New Trusteeship Models

Having developed a partnership with lay stakeholders in the **management** of their schools, a further step considered was the passing on of Trusteeship of those schools in whole or in part to lay people. Trusteeship of schools, as already mentioned, refers to the moral and legal responsibilities of those entrusted with the **provision** of education according to a particular ethos. Traditionally this role was exercised by the owners of the schools, eg a Religious Congregation. It is true that, decline in membership was among the factors that caused these congregations, anxious to ensure Catholic Education provision into the future, to consider the transfer of the trusteeship of their schools. However as Sr. Teresa McCormack, whom many of you may remember always held that *'even if Congregations were not experiencing a decline in membership, there would be an argument for considering new forms of Trusteeship of schools. There is no solid base for believing that the continuation of the Catholic School depends on direct involvement of religious. The provision of the Catholic School is in fact the responsibility of the whole Catholic community.'* Inspired by this thinking many religious congregations are now engaged, in some instances through collaboration with other congregations, in planning and setting up new forms of trusteeship. By these means, some or all responsibility for the schools they formally owned and ran will be transferred to Trusts or Trust Boards made up wholly or partly of dedicated lay people. These Trusts and Trust Boards will promote and participate in the same mission of the Church and will promote the same philosophy of education as the religious congregation did.

The Trusts and Trusts Board established or being established are as follows

:The des Places Educational Association (DEA) This is a limited Company set up by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit designated to act as Patron of the nine Holy Ghost schools and colleges in Ireland. It is managed by the Board of Directors, who are members of the Congregation and lay persons.

Loreto Trust Board In Ireland there are over 30 schools under the trusteeship of the Loreto Trust Board. Of these. Seventeen are Voluntary Secondary schools and seven are Primary/Junior schools, and

two in Northern Ireland are Voluntary Grammar schools. Loreto also shares trusteeship with others in four Community schools.

CEIST Catholic Education – an Irish Schools Trust

This is the new Trust Body responsible for the voluntary secondary schools of the Daughters of Charity, the Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of the Christian Retreat, the Sisters of Mercy and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. It holds 112 Post Primary schools.

ERST Edmund Rice Schools Trust

This Trust is committed to the mission and vision of Edmund Rice and is responsible for 97 primary and post primary school schools which were previously in the trusteeship of the Christian Brothers

Le Chéile Trust

This Trust is being set up by twelve religious congregations. Cross and Passion Sisters, De la Salle Brothers, Dominican Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, Holy Faith Sisters, Patrician Brothers, Poor Servants of the Mother of God, Religious of Christian Education, Sisters of Charity of St. Paul, Sisters of Jesus and Mary, Sisters of St. Louis, Society of the Holy Child Jesus

It will carry out the role of trusteeship that has, up to now, been done by individual congregations. The twelve congregations are currently responsible for 45 voluntary secondary schools and are trustees in 8 Community Schools. They also run a number of primary schools, third level institutions and are engaged in different education projects for disadvantaged young people.

Other Congregations Dioceses and Lay Owners

A certain number of schools in congregational, diocesan and lay ownership continue to be operated as single Trusts by their owners. In many cases they form Networks of Support among themselves in the service of their Trustee responsibilities.

Function of the Trusts

All these Trusts carry out the legal and inspirational roles as outlined in the Education Act and in their own Charter documents. These include

overall responsibility for ethos development, property and finance .Among the services they provide are Support of Boards of Management, ; Leadership Training, Consultative services to schools on a range of issues, networking and communication within the Trust and with a wide range of other bodies, planning and negotiation. The Congregations either directly finance the Trusts or have set up trust funds or other funding mechanisms for the Trusts. To date the State makes no financial contribution to Trusts.

Catholic Education Service

The policy direction of the Church and Religious congregations is to continue to hold, as a provider, a position in a multi- provision arena and as I have outlined many congregations have decided to entrust their educational enterprises to Lay Trusts in the tradition of their founders/foundresses as enshrined in their respective Charters. In order to support this policy direction, CORI and the Irish Episcopal Conference have decided to set up a Catholic Education Service which is now close to being established. The CES is envisaged as the strong central structure to support a vibrant Catholic education sector in response to changing social, economic and political conditions in Ireland. It will serve the formal education system at all levels as well as the non formal and informal sectors and will be an all Ireland body.

State Support for Catholic Education

As school provision in Ireland becomes more diversified, it is important that the State recognizes that there continues to be a demand for Catholic schools by parents in Ireland. At second level where there is a wide choice of provision, 55% of students currently attend voluntary catholic secondary schools. At first level, the survey referred to earlier ,indicates that should all types of schools be available to them, over 50% would choose Catholic schools. There are indications at second level that the provision necessary for the continuance of choice for Catholic parents is being eroded. Data relating to school amalgamations provided by the Commission for School Accommodation and from Planning Department of DES shows that in the period 2000 – 2007 eighteen amalgamations involving 27 Catholic Voluntary schools and 13 Vocational schools resulted in the establishment of 4 Voluntary schools. Even more significant is the facts relating to the setting up of new schools in the period from 1992 to 2007. During that period thirty one new schools were established throughout the country. Only one of these was designated a

Catholic Voluntary Secondary School and that has since closed. This seems to indicate that there is a policy assumption in the Department of Education and Science that every new school at second level should be multi denominational. The new model primary school, under the auspices of the VEC has been welcomed by the Catholic Church authorities; but this should not be interpreted as implying that it approves a ‘one size fits all’ solution to educational provision.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church is committed to denominational education that is distinctive and inclusive. While expecting its school community to uphold and support its values, it welcomes all who wish to learn within that school community and it intends to remain a provider as long as parents choose Catholic schools.

I would like to conclude with the final remarks of *Vision 08* in its invitation to a dialogue about the development of the Catholic School in the coming decades:

‘We are convinced that this {development} can only happen on the sure foundation of remaining faithful to the Gospel we serve while, at the same time, ‘scrutinizing the signs of the times’, as these signs emerge in the needs and demands of the national and international community in which we belong. In this way, in conversation with all our partners in education, we will ensure that the structures, and the schools themselves, remain effective, relevant and true to an authentic vision of the Catholic school.’