Consultation for the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

Respondent’s Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dr. Gareth Byrne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position (if applicable)</td>
<td>Coordinator of the Irish Centre for Religious Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation (if applicable)</td>
<td>Irish Centre for Religious Education, Mater Dei Institute of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Clonliffe Road, Dublin 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>7th June, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] On behalf of an organisation [ X ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

It is intended to place the submissions on the internet.

Information in relation to this submission may be made available to any person who makes a request under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003.
Executive Summary

The Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE) welcomes the establishment of the Forum for Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector and, prompted by Section 4 of its public submission form, wishes to contribute to the discussion on Patronage and Pluralism by focusing on the nature and place of religious education across patronage systems. As Minister Ruairí Quinn, TD, confirmed at the launch of the Forum:

_In particular, the arrangements for the delivery of religious education must be such that the rights of all members of the school community are acknowledged and respected._

This submission from the ICRE is set out in seven observations which can be summarised as follows:

1. In response to the concerns raised by various UN committees in 2005, 2008 and 2011 about the needs of parents who seek a fully secular education the State should, in the first instance, encourage such parents to establish viable schools with a secular characteristic spirit and then recognise and provide for such schools on the same basis as applies to schools linked to existing patronage models.

2. Where secular schools cannot be provided for by the State the rights of parents, children, teachers and patrons in regard to freedom of religion and belief in denominational and multi-denominational schools can only be appropriately responded to by developing a shared understanding about the nature of full human development and the contribution that religious education makes in this regard.

3. Religious education is not a private activity but occurs in the public space. It must be educationally grounded, exhibit an interreligious character, respond to the needs of the learner (appropriate to their developmental phase and experience) and contribute to their search for meaning and value both as an individual and in the context of any community of faith or conviction with which they are associated.

4. The rights of the child as a citizen and the importance of social cohesion and mutual respect in a democratic society require an educational foundation in religious education (at a minimum ‘learning about religion and beliefs’).

5. In an appropriate form religious education should be provided for all children in all schools, religious or secular, irrespective of patron, in a manner that acknowledges freedom of religion and belief.

6. Working with parents and families, denominational faith schools must be free to provide faith formation activities for the pupils of the faith tradition of the patron, and must work with other parents and families to provide for other forms of formation in the variety of religious faiths and secular convictions present in the school.

7. All schools, irrespective of patron, must appropriately respond to multi-cultural diversity, including diversity of religion and beliefs, within their educational community.

---

1 Speech by Mr. Ruairí Quinn TD, Minister for Education and Skills, ‘Launch of Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector’.
1. In response to the concerns raised by various UN committees in 2005, 2008 and 2011 about the needs of parents who seek a fully secular education, the State should, in the first instance, encourage such parents to establish viable schools with a secular characteristic spirit and then recognise and provide for such schools on the same basis as applies to schools linked to existing patronage models.

Noting the concerns raised by various United Nations Committees and the recent publication by the Irish Human Rights Commission *Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective* (May 2011), the ICRE acknowledges that it is the role of the State to provide for the education of children by recognising viable schools established by groups of parents according to a variety of diverse patronage models.

It is the role of the State to ‘provide for’ education, not to ‘provide’. In concrete terms, patronage and trustee structures are an expression of parental wishes. Viable expressions of parental provision are then provided for by the State once such enterprises meet criteria specified by the State. In a broad sense, the State should seek to provide for education under a wide variety of patronage systems, including supporting parents who come together to provide viable secular schools.

As suggested in the fourth recommendation of *Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective*, discussion is required about how terms such as ‘denominational’, ‘multi-denomination’, ‘inter-denominational’, ‘non-denominational’ and indeed ‘secular’ are understood both by patrons and in the public domain. The use of the terms multi-denominational and inter-denominational suggests that the contribution of the religious denominations involved plays a shaping role in the ethos or characteristic spirit of the school. The terms non-denominational and secular should be used when appropriate.

2. Where secular schools cannot be provided for by the State, the rights of parents, children, teachers and patrons in regard to freedom of religion and belief in denominational and multi-denominational schools can only be appropriately responded to by developing a shared understanding about the nature of full human development and the contribution that religious education makes in this regard.

While acceptance of a diversity of religious faiths and secular convictions, and of their contribution to society, is essential within the pluralist character of a modern liberal democracy such as the Republic of Ireland, a shared understanding about the nature of full human development and the role religious education can play in this regard in all Irish schools should be developed.

The case can be made that in the socio-cultural environment of Ireland today, religion has the potential to provide a necessary counterbalance to the tendency in a secular age to situate public discourse only within an immanent frame of reference. In privileging the other, otherness

---

and transcendence, religious education provides a very important service to societal well-being and offers a corrective to reductive tendencies in the increasingly dominant materialistic ethos of our day.

Support for this argument is provided by the contention of sociologist Robert Bellah\(^3\) and philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre,\(^4\) and more recently Charles Taylor,\(^5\) that despite the many benefits to western society which can be attributed to a secular culture, it can give rise to a loss of connectedness to ‘the other’ as a transcendent source of meaning and value and that this is a real loss which risks trivializing the human project.

Religious education draws attention to the experience of the other as nothing less than the most fundamental experience of human existence – something that challenges one to respond. It is a challenge that cannot easily, if at all, be side-stepped without harmful consequences both for human flourishing and societal coherence. The view of religious education that is being recommended here is one that has nothing in common with the exclusivity and/or sectarianism that is often presented as a caricature of religious belief. It is proposed in the light of a core shared philosophical perspective which unites all the major world religions.

It can be argued then, strictly on the grounds of the public good, that religious education is important for the continued existence of an orderly civil society. The anthropological perspective highlighted here is not uniquely in the gift of, but one which is privileged by, religious education.

3. Religious education is not a private activity but occurs in the public space. It must be educationally grounded, exhibit an interreligious character, respond to the needs of the learner (appropriate to their developmental phase and experience) and contribute to their search for meaning and value both as an individual and in the context of any community of faith or conviction with which they are associated.

Religion has a role to play in education and religious education is a valid and indeed necessary enterprise in the public space for the good of individuals and of society.

This is not just opinion but is enshrined in the Irish Constitution (42.1), and reinforced by the Education Act 1998 which upholds the right of the child to a spiritual and moral education and by the Supreme Court judgement on the payment of chaplains in community schools. This right is given expression in the DES’ definition of the aim of education:

*The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and home life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure.*

Religious education, while it makes a particularly focused contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the young person, engages with all the above named aspects of human development, for the benefit of the individual, for the benefit of the community to which they belong and for the development of society itself. Religious education in Ireland in the last thirty


years has moved from an exclusively ecclesial arena to the public space and has become ‘important for the formation of global citizens, at home with diversity, at ease in a range of cultural spaces.’

Religious Education is one of the seven curriculum areas designated in the Primary School Curriculum, 1999. Six of the seven curriculum areas are defined by the Department, while the development of religious education remains the responsibility of the different church authorities within the schools for which they are patrons. New patronage bodies have also taken on the duty of overseeing religious education in their schools.

A clear framework for the religious education in second-level schools is provided by the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus and the Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus. Its key aims are stated as follows:

- To foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, all ages and at all times
- To explore how this search for meaning has found and continues to find its expression in religion
- 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 life-style, interpersonal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts
- To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life
- To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student.

Thus religious education as defined here in the Irish context is intended to invite the second-level pupil to encounter and engage with religious traditions, reflect on his or her own religious experiences and explore his or her individual commitment to a particular religious tradition and/or continuing search for meaning. Religious education develops pupils’ knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes in dialogue with the religious, spiritual and ethical heritage of humanity. It seeks to engage the young person in learning ‘about’ religion/s and ‘from’ religion/s, ‘about’ belief/s and ‘from’ belief/s.

This treatment of religious education in the Irish schooling context is consistent with the approach of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) whereby a study of religion is promoted and situated in the contexts of human rights education, active citizenship, inter-culturalism and social cohesion. Of particular importance to religious education is the Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention (2003) arising from the conference of the European Ministers of Culture held in Opatija, Croatia. The Council of Europe argues that a ‘general’ information-based religious education should be provided in all schools, both common (public) and faith schools, in order to promote social cohesion through an appreciation of common citizenship with associated rights and duties. The aim of a ‘general’ religious education is to give the future citizen a global perspective on religious and spiritual diversity and its manifestations in a way

---

that both acknowledges religious freedom and is sensitive to human rights education and education for mutual respect and understanding.

The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (2007) of the OSCE were prepared in “order to contribute to an improved understanding of the world’s increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere”. They are based on two convictions, the first “that there is positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for everyone’s right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes”, thus contributing to social cohesion. They are concerned to articulate an “educational approach that seeks to provide teaching about different religions and beliefs as distinguished from instruction in a specific religion or belief. They also aim to offer criteria that should be considered when and wherever teaching about religions and beliefs takes place”. As such they inform not only the practice of religious education in the classroom but also the way in which teachers of religion are themselves educated. The richness of the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools can only be really appreciated by looking at its ten key Guiding Principles, its Justification for the teaching of religion in all schools, its Conclusions and its Recommendations. It is the view of the ICRE that in making its own recommendations the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector should take account of these four key contributions.

The OSCE explicitly addresses the Toledo Guiding Principles in the provision of, and approach to, religious education in the public or common school context. Their application in the Irish context clearly requires reflective accommodation given the large number of private faith based schools and the balance between denominational and multi-denomination second level schools.

In denominational schools, as well as learning ‘about’ and ‘from’ religion/s and beliefs, pupils of that particular faith tradition will learn ‘within’ their own faith. The school facilitates the religious education and formation of pupils of the particular faith without imposing that faith on other children. The quality of a person’s understanding of and respect for their own religious (or secular convictions) is as important as their understanding of and respect for others. A responsible citizen must be educated to hold their own beliefs and convictions in a way that contributes to the common good. All schools should be aware of the evolving inter-cultural nature not only of society but of the school itself. Where appropriate an inter-religious approach to education may be helpful.9

Denominational schools respect and cherish the freedom and beliefs of their young people. They have over the years developed a keen sensitivity against any form of indoctrination or proselytism.10 The continuing reference to the need for denominational schools to avoid such in the recent document from the Irish Human Rights Commission, Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective (May 2011) does not do justice to the reality of respect shown to the beliefs of all students within denominational schools in Ireland. These schools, both Catholic and Protestant, are alert to and strongly affirm that young people should never be compelled to participate in any actions contrary to his or her own religious or other convictions or those of his or her family. The Irish Catholic Bishops are very clear on this:

---

9 See D. A. Lane, Challenges Facing Religious Education in Ireland Today, Veritas, 2008.
The Catholic school promotes tolerance, respect and inclusivity. Its educational perspective is Catholic and ecumenical by nature and open to inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues... It promotes ‘the formation of young people in the construction of a world based on dialogue and the search for community... on the mutual acceptance of differences rather than on their opposition’. All students should be encouraged to have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith and its traditions, and also of other faith communities. On the other hand, no pupil need receive, or be present at, any religious education of which her or his parents or guardians disapprove.11

4. The rights of the child as a citizen and the importance of social cohesion and mutual respect in a democratic society require an educational foundation in religious education (at a minimum ‘learning about religion and beliefs).

Taking all that has been said above, religious education is an important element in the holistic education of children in contemporary Ireland. Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) highlights the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It notes the rights and duties of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. It confirms that freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Primary school pupils are curious about the big questions. School, along with home and local faith or other community plays its part as a natural environment “within which primary-level children find support, not only for their everyday physical, emotional and social requirements but also for their everyday religious, moral and spiritual needs.”12

The Primary Curriculum (1999) clearly confirms the position of religious education within a holistic vision of what education can be:

In seeking to develop the full potential of the individual, the curriculum takes into account the child’s affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious needs. 13

The religious education provided for children in primary schools should be appropriate to their development as children. James Fowler, following in the tradition of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg, has helped those involved in religious education to capture an understanding of the stages through which faith/belief may develop from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. In early childhood (aged 3-7 approximately), Fowler argues, faith is fantasy-filled and the child is responsive to imaginative interaction with the adults in their lives. In later childhood (aged 8-12) a more linear, narrative construction of coherence and meaning is experienced. A sense is developed of where and with whom the child is at home. This is “the stage in which the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and

observances that symbolise belonging to his or her community.” The religious education of primary school children should therefore focus on helping the child become aware of and grow into the religious or other community to which they and their parents/guardians belong, while promoting openness and mutual respect for others from a different cultural, ethnic, national or religious background. Children at primary level learn through the local and particular.

As J.W. Berryman points out, there is common agreement that the dominant faith development issues during childhood are belonging and being cherished. It is only with the onset of adolescence that young people generally engage more fully in the struggle to find their own identity, looking beyond those who have held positions of authority in their lives. What is required at primary-level is support for children along their respective religious and other journeys, rather than an abstract comparative overview of religions inappropriate to their stage of development. The child’s freedom not to commit or to raise other issues must always be accepted and respected. The child can be an inspiration to adults too, opening them up “to fresh ways of seeing life, love and relationships”.

A second issue, relevant to the religious education needs and rights of children is the relationship between affective, active and cognitive ways of knowing available to children. Often adults with the best of intentions reduce religious education to the intellectual comprehension of religious concepts. Other adults focus almost exclusively on the very real but also limited experience of the child. Religious education curricula should be careful to adopt an approach that draws together affective opportunity, active engagement, and cognitive reflection, and, thereby, challenges the young person at a variety of complementary learning levels.

Affective learning touches the heart, awakening the person to a deep and personal response to encountered reality. By engaging with emotions, attitudes and values, affective content involves children in becoming aware of their own feeling-reaction and commitment to a given reality. Religious education develops a relational mode of knowing between the self and the other which while seeking to be “fair, balanced, inclusive and devoid of bias”, cannot be adequately described by the use of terms such as ‘objective’.

5. In an appropriate form religious education should be provided for all children in all schools, religious or secular, irrespective of patron, in a manner that acknowledges freedom of religion and belief.

It is important that all children be religiously literate i.e. have basic, accurate, respectful information about the main belief systems and practices surrounding the main world religions and secular traditions in Ireland as well as the importance of those traditions to people who adhere to them. If we are to address fully the rights of children then we should seek to prioritise

---

16 Share the Good New, 91.
17 Toledo Guiding Principles, p. 31.
a critical, activity based, empathetic approach in schools to assist all children to think about and ask deeper questions relating to religion/s and to belief systems in general and to learn from them. We should seek to support them growing into their religious or other belief tradition, always with an openness to the other.

The State, through the DES Syllabus for Religious Education has set out a clear rationale and support system for the inclusion of religious education in post-primary schools. The State syllabuses are assessed and accredited by the State Examinations Commission, and supported by the Subject Association and Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Quality assurance mechanisms are provided through the Subject Inspection Reports as well as the Chief Examiner’s Report.

This model of good practice at post-primary level has the potential to influence developments at primary level. Religious education should always be taught in a reflective manner promoting awareness, appreciation and solidarity. All those who participate in religious education do so from a particular perspective which should be respected. This acknowledgement of perspective does not suggest indoctrination but challenges all providers to be genuinely open, inclusive and respectful. Parents should (and do) have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction which has faith formation in a particular religious tradition as its focus. However it should not be necessary, and indeed is not desirable, to opt out of a broader religious education which supports a variety of beliefs and commitments and which seeks to enhance social cohesion by promoting a depth knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the religious and human heritage of humankind and the impact of this upon local, national and global cultures and societies.

The State can and should require that all schools at primary-level have a clear understanding of the significant role of religious education and make adequate provision supported by school policies and practice. The mission statement, ethos statement, religious education policy, and religious diversity policy should reflect the honoured place of religious education, defined in an appropriate manner, in each school and in the teaching and learning atmosphere it provides. A quality assurance process for assessing ongoing engagement with and development of school ethos, religious education, and diversity policies is required. It is valid for the State, along with others, especially the patronage body, to develop its role in overseeing good practice in this area.

The European Research Project on Religion and Education (REDCo) offers examples of models of provision for the teaching of religion throughout Europe.

The study of religious education is also a significant element in the preparation of primary school teachers. As religious education is recognised as a subject area in the primary

---

Irish Centre for Religious Education, Mater Dei Institute of Education

curriculum it must be addressed adequately as a curriculum subject in any primary teacher education degree that seeks to prepare teachers for the Irish primary school system. This point is valid irrespective of the particular religious education programmes endorsed by patrons of schools. It does not undermine the right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion of student teachers.\textsuperscript{21} The religious education issues raised are greater than any one faith or denominational interest.

In this context, the Toledo Guiding Principles refer also to the challenge facing third-level educational institutions which are under the patronage of a particular religious community:

*Where religious communities are responsible for pre-service and in-service education of teachers in subjects related to teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools these communities are encouraged to reach out to other belief communities. Such actions can help to strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher education pertaining to teaching about religions and beliefs. It is also the best guarantee that such education is fair, balanced, inclusive and devoid of bias. Collaboration in this area to promote inter-faith dialogue is a positive aim in itself.*\textsuperscript{22}

6. Working with parents and families, denominational faith schools must be free to provide faith formation activities for the pupils of the faith tradition of the patron, and must work with other parents and families to provide for other forms of formation in the variety of religious faiths and secular convictions present in the school.

We have argued that all children have the right to religious education contributing as it does to their full human development, and delivered in a manner appropriate to the school and to the child.

All schools have a character/ethos that both informs and is reflected in every aspect of the life of the school. It is not possible to ‘confine’ the ethos of a school (denominational, multi-denominational or secular) to one aspect of its curriculum or of its timetable, for that would be to misunderstand the nature of character or ethos. The advantage of a defined ethos is that it is public to those who enquire about it. The notion of ethos in a denominational school, while having distinct and sometimes conflicting principles for some parents, children and teachers, would also have principles shared by those of religious faith and secular convictions, e.g. the dignity of the person, fairness and justice, subsidiarity in decision-making, responsibility for school community and respect for the environment. The ethos of any school and the religious education that takes place there can be upheld in a way that respects the religious freedom of pupils, staff and parents who do not share the religious faith or secular character of the school.

The Catholic Church in Ireland, for example, expects its schools to be characterised by respect, generosity, justice, hospitality, critical reflection, and open to and enriched by pupils from all cultural and religious backgrounds. It is, however, transparent in acknowledging the service it offers to Catholic parents:

*The Catholic primary school, as an outreach of the local parish, will seek to nourish the faith of its Catholic students and assist in their Christian initiation. It will respect the religious tradition of other students and facilitate them in every way.*\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22} Toledo Guiding Principles, p.31.

\textsuperscript{23} *Share the Good News*, 147.
In fact, Catholic schools support parents of children from other faiths and convictions in making provision for suitable religious education for their children:

Where parents/guardians of children, other than Catholic children, attending the school, wish to provide suitable faith education for their children, the school principal will be happy to encourage them in this regard.\textsuperscript{24}

Schools under denominational patronage are often caricatured as being closed institutions. Such a caricature does not take account of the evolving educational system that has responded in a generous and inclusive way to the changing needs of local communities, including the need for appropriate religious education. The WSE reports offer insightful commentary on the number of schools whose characteristic spirit is one of openness and inclusivity.

7. All schools, irrespective of patron, must appropriately respond to multi-cultural diversity, including diversity of religion and beliefs, within their educational community.

All existing and future models of patronage should promote an inclusive and respectful approach to diversity across a range of socio-economic and cultural issues including, but not confined to, religion and beliefs.

In public debate the use of the terms ‘multi-denominational’ and ‘multi-cultural’ are sometimes confused, implying that denominational schools are somehow mono-cultural and multi-denominational schools are multi-cultural. All schools in Ireland today, whether denominational, multi-denominational or non-denominational, are multi-cultural and must reach out to a variety of pupils and their parents/guardians creating an environment that values cultural diversity, provides a variety of opportunities for meetings with parents, and promotes intercultural education across curriculum areas.\textsuperscript{25}

Religious education, like all education, is not an objective or neutral imparting of information but the promotion of an active engagement between the learner and the act of knowing that is approached in a manner respectful and inclusive of diversity. Teaching from the pupil’s experience of religion and/or their continuing search for meaning enriches their own understanding and their ability to respect the beliefs and commitments of others. For those with religious faith, such faith needs to be educated and integrated with their general knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, and facilitated in a manner that helps them as citizens to embrace the common good.

The Education Act requires that the Board of Management of a school uphold its ethos. The mission statement, ethos statement, religious education policy, religious diversity policy and other supporting documentation should be carefully set out and reviewed regularly to ensure openness, transparency and clarity. The Board has the right to expect that staff uphold the evolving characteristic spirit of the school. This does not require that a staff member be of the particular denomination, tradition or belief system of the school. In Catholic schools this is clear: “The school will respect the freedom of conscience of teachers in matters of personal

\textsuperscript{24} Share the Good News, 101.

\textsuperscript{25} See NCCA, Intercultural Education in the Primary Schools: Guidelines for Schools, 2005.
religious belief and practice.”  

However, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion of teachers is not best served by the lack of variety of school types.

The competence and sensitivity of the teacher is key: “The most important considerations in this regard relate to professional expertise, as well as to basic attitudes towards or commitment to human rights in general and freedom of religion or belief in particular, rather than religious affiliation or conviction.”  

However, faith formation within a particular tradition should on the other hand be engaged with by a person who is happy to make such a contribution.

Of course it may be difficult to identify generally what religions or belief systems are to be taught in a particular school context, what aspects of those religions/traditions should be focused upon, and the specific methodologies to be used to teach them. The identity and ethos of the particular school and the make-up of the student body will shape this process.

Closing Comment

The Irish Centre for Religious Education, founded at the Mater Dei Institute of Education and working with others nationally and internationally, seeks to help define good practice in religious education teaching, learning and research. Within the public space there is a need to understand religious education and the contribution it can make respectfully and appropriately to the education of individuals for their own development and for the common good. Different perspectives and interests must be acknowledged within any debate about religious education.

There is a need at this moment in our history for a generous, well-founded understanding of the value of good religious education among various stakeholders. In this way the relation between religious education, patronage and the multicultural reality in which we now live should become clearer. The issues are complex and require all to take into account the multi-faceted needs and rights of children, parents/guardians, teachers and patrons alike, as well as the legitimate expectations of the State, in providing a balanced response for the good of all. The ICRE affirms its commitment to support and act as a resource for those participating in this debate.

Religious education should not be characterised as a problem to be solved. It has a contribution to make to the individual, to local communities and to society generally in contemporary Ireland.

---

26 Share the Good News, 151.
27 Toledo Guiding Principles, p. 35.