



## Society of the Sacred Heart Mission of Education in the Church

### The Society's Mission of Education in Australia 1882-2016

From 1882-2015, the Religious of the Sacred Heart have carried out the Society's Mission of Education in the Church in Australia through our Religious Institute Schools, Parish Primary and Secondary Schools and University Colleges. Our philosophy of education is articulated in the five Goals of Sacred Heart Education adopted by the Australia New Zealand Province:

1. A personal and active faith in God.
2. Deep respect for intellectual values.
3. Social awareness that impels to action.
4. Building community as a Christian value.
5. Personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.

Until the mid-1970s, RSCJ carried the administration of the Society's Schools and assumed this responsibility in Parish Schools and University Colleges.

In the mid-1970s the need was recognised for another level of governance of Society Schools and School Councils were established. Subsequently a further change was needed: in Australia, the School Boards were incorporated under civil law as companies limited by guarantee with accountabilities to the Society. Directors of the Boards were and continue to be appointed by the Provincial and her Council and have included RSCJ.

The emphasis on the role of the laity at Vatican II was the stimulus for change in the ANZ Province with lay people continuing with us in partnership in our mission of education in the Church. This included collaboration in governance and as educators in the tradition of the Society of the Sacred Heart. In all our educational undertakings, our colleagues carry the mission and charism for us, with us. (General Chapter 2008 Society of the Sacred Heart).

Vatican II affirmed the right of the Baptised to be involved in the Church's Mission and encouraged them to take up this responsibility. This direction has guided the Society of the Sacred Heart in Australia as it participates in the mission of the Church through the service of education. (Cf. Constitutions par. 7)

Our Congregational reality in the Province of Australia-New Zealand is that our numbers are diminishing.

### The Present Status of Sacred Heart Schools under Canon (Church) Law in Australia

All Catholic schools have a formal relationship with a Church entity. In our case, each school has been set up by the Religious of the Sacred Heart and is related to the Province. The Province is a Church entity and belongs to a larger one, the Society of the Sacred Heart. The Canon Law term for such an entity is Public Juridic Person (PJP).

A new Public Juridic Person status can be conferred by the Vatican, a Bishops' Conference or a Bishop.

### The Emerging Future of Sacred Heart Education in Australia

In 2013, the Provincial Council recognised that a new level of governance of our Schools was needed. Our Constitutions: *It is at provincial level, according to the diversity of our cultures, that we discern in what places and by what concrete means we are to carry out our service of education.* (Constitutions 1982 par.12) The Provincial Council made the decision to build on the strong history of collaboration with lay people by appointing a Working Party. Its task was to explore possible ways to carry the governance of our three Schools in Australia into the future, thus maintaining commitment to our mission of education in the Church.

The Chair of the Australian Schools Governance Working Party (ASGWP) was Sister Elizabeth Dodds RSC with three RSCJ members, Rita Carroll, Diana Hayes and Anne McGrath. On their

recommendation, the Provincial Council decided to petition the Vatican for a Pontifical Public Juridic Person (PPJP) under canon law. After endorsement by the Society's General Council in Rome, the Petition was taken to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) for approval in July 2016.

The approval now given by the Vatican gives the new entity the same status in Canon Law as the Province and it will report to the Vatican.

### **The Petition for the Pontifical Public Juridic Person (PPJP)**

The Petition included:

- A rationale for the Petition
- A history of the Society and the apostolic works in the Australia-New Zealand Province
- A Scriptural and Theological foundation
- A framework for formation for leadership for the Directors
- Canon Law Statutes
- Civil Legal Constitution
- A Financial Plan for the Society in Australia and the new PPJP
- Letters from the Archbishops of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, giving their support for the formation of a PPJP

The new PPJP will be called *Sophia Education Ministries*, a name decided by the Provincial Council after consultation with the RSCJ in the ANZ Province.

It will also have a logo designed by a graphic artist.

The Provincial Council has decided not to include Baradene College, Auckland at this stage due to the different legal structure and system of education in New Zealand.

### **Responsibility for the Pontifical Public Juridic Person (PPJP)**

The Directors of Sophia Education Ministries (SEM), appointed by the single member, the Society, will consist of not less than 5 and not more than 7 persons. The Canon Law Statutes detail the roles and responsibilities of the Directors which are currently vested in two groups: the Provincial and her Council and the Board of Sacred Heart Education Ministries (SHEM).

Anything that is presently reported to the Provincial Council will be reported by the School Boards to the Directors of Sophia Education Ministries.

Sophia Education Ministries will take over the ownership of the three Australian School properties when the new entity is established. For property and other issues, the School Boards will be reporting to the Directors of Sophia Education Ministries rather than to Sacred Heart Education Ministries (SHEM).

The Directors of Sophia Education Ministries will appoint the Directors of the School Boards.

### **Appointment of Directors of Sophia Education Ministries (SEM) by the Provincial Council**

The Provincial Council will establish a list of potential Directors who meet the requirements under the Canon Law Statutes.

The Provincial Council invited some potential Directors to a meeting in March 2016 in order to inform them about the new entity and the roles and responsibilities of Directors.

Criteria for appointment will be established, interviews of potential Directors will be conducted, ensuring that there is an appropriate skill mix among them. RSCJ may be appointed as Directors as well as laity. A process of discernment will be undertaken by the Provincial Council to confirm the appointment of Directors.

## Time Frame for establishing this Pontifical Public Juridic Person (PPJP)

There are three stages in the process.

- 1) The **Petition** stage: This was completed in July 2016 when the Petition was approved by the three Archbishops of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney and presented to the General Council of the Society in Rome. The General Council approved the Petition and presented it to CICLSAL.
- 2) The **Implementation** stage: can now be progressed. The Provincial Council will appoint an Implementation Committee to manage this. This stage will include
  - appointment of the Directors of Sophia Education Ministries by the Provincial Council,
  - formation of the Directors,
  - addressing issues of finance and legal matters.
- 3) The **Establishment** stage will see the Directors of Sophia Education Ministries assume their role and responsibilities. Hopefully this can be achieved by the end of 2017. The transfer of the school properties to the new entity will take place at a time to be determined.

## Conclusion

Saint Madeleine Sophie faced challenges as new needs arose and encouraged RSCJ to embrace change as times changed.

Let us glean from her wisdom in a conference she gave to the Religious on 20 November 1857.

*The first person to be placed as a foundation stone of our little Society did not amount to much... It is you who are the hope of the Society; one day you will be its foundation stones. When we die how glad we shall be, yes, glad to leave behind us to sustain the Society those who are devoted to it, who will fulfil the plan of God for it. When we have disappeared you will carry on, better than we have done, the work that we began.*

The Society's General Chapter in 2008 affirms Sophie's vision by writing to Sacred Heart Friends and Colleagues: We have recognised the many ways in which you are a part of the Society of the Sacred Heart... [you] carry the mission and charism for us, with us.

The Provincial Council and the RSCJ of the ANZ Province invite all members of our Sacred Heart Family to move forward with courage and confidence.



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Susan Ross

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