





In line with the ERST Charter, St Mary's, in partnership with the home and the parish, is dedicated to providing and developing a Catholic education that cultivates a living faith, fosters Christian spirituality, and educates our young people in Gospel-based values.

Here at St Mary's, we are mindful of the increasingly post-Christian and secular world in which our students live. We proclaim the true purpose of Catholic Education - that each member of our community, staff and student, is a unique and precious child of God.

*Catholic Education takes place in communities inspired by the Spirit of Christ. Christ's commandment to love God and neighbour inspires a caring ethos which is expressed in relationships within and beyond Catholic schools.*

Catholic schools exist on a very different plane from other secular educational institutions. The primary purpose of the Catholic school is to bring the liberating, salvific message of Jesus Christ to all. They exist not only to point to the next life but to bring life to the full to all in this world. As educators within the Catholic sector, we have a moral duty to ensure that every student is made aware of teachings and morality of Christ. Our young people should feel valued, respected and be given the opportunity to develop academically, emotionally and spiritually.

We believe that our school community should be one of faith, service, prayer and worship. The recent appointment of a School Chaplaincy Team clearly highlights our desire to lead staff and students in their faith journey.

### **Student Provision**

In order to ensure that each pupil is given an opportunity to develop the spiritual we have developed the following:

Classroom teachers begin each class with prayer. Traditionally this prayer is the Hail Mary, but our students and staff also have prayer cards with alternative prayers. The Edmund Rice prayer is prominently displayed in every classroom.

Assemblies should always begin with a prayer and, although addressing various aspects of school life, should also acknowledge the liturgical calendar.

Liturgical displays play a central role in highlighting our faith. They call all members of the school community to reflect and respond to the faith.

Retreats take place for pupils of Year 8, Year 11 & Year 13. These are important transition years in which our students should be given an opportunity to reflect on their faith relationship with God and their social and moral relationships with others.

PA Prayers & Reflections offer an opportunity for whole-school reflection and prayer based on the liturgical seasons, world events and school specific issues.

Liturgical Services (Year Group Masses etc) & Prayer Services are an important way for our school community to identify with and express our faith in Christ.

Our annual Year 8 Edmund Rice Project allows pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the life of Blessed Edmund and the Christian Brothers'. This culminates in a reward trip for fourteen Year 8 students who make a two-day visit to Mount Sion, Callan and Waterford.

We strongly advocate the importance of chastity and respect for God's gift of human sexuality. This is conveyed to our pupils in Religion class and during their Science curriculum sex education. We regularly utilise the Love for Life team as a value-added approach to Christian perspectives on Sexuality & Relationships (linked policy – Relationships and Sexuality Policy)

Year 12 pupils attend Pro-Life conferences. This is our way of upholding and promoting the sanctity of human life and the rights of the unborn child as a practical and visible sign of faith.

Year 8 pupils take part in a Gideon Bible Society presentation during the first school term. This reflects and embeds the bible work they have covered in class and allows for a Christian witness to the importance and relevance of the Bible. This event culminates in the presentation of New Testament Scriptures to all Year 8 pupils.

Ecumenical dialogue and outreach with other Christian denominations & other world faiths is also important. We are confident in our faith and feel that promoting tolerance and respect for diversity of faith is important. This has included visits to the school by members of the Belfast Islamic Centre, visits to the Belfast Synagogue and an outreach programme with the Methodist Church as well as attendance at Four Corner events with other students. Work is also beginning with our Shared Education partners which is contributing to dialogue with students with other faiths.

Support for the Catholics' Caring and St Vincent De Paul outreach initiatives allow our students to actively live out their faith in God in their commitment to show love for neighbour whilst supporting vulnerable members of our own society.

The Zambia Immersion Project allows our whole school community to engage in global outreach. This culminates in our annual visit to our friends and hosts in Lusaka. This programme is not about charity but about recognising the inherent human dignity of every person. In the spirit of Blessed Edmund, we stand in solidarity with our Zambian brothers and sisters as we work together to promote the building of the Kingdom of God.

### **Staff Provision**

Staff faith development is also an important consideration and one which we continually seek to augment and nurture. We encourage staff on their continuing faith journey by:

Beginning and ending all staff events with a common prayer.

Celebrating the distinctive ethos of a Christian Brother inspired school annually.

Providing teachers with an opportunity to participate in the celebration of the Mass (at specific liturgical times).

Facilitating spiritual and moral reflections for staff (via internal email and during staff events).

## **Shared/Common Worship**

The School Oratory is a focal point for the prayer life in the school.

The sacred space/prayer room provides staff and students with a quiet space for meditation or reflection – time out from the daily schedule and busy school life.

Stations of the Cross images have been developed in collaboration with the Religion and Art departments. Displayed in prominent positions throughout the school, these are used for prayerful reflection on the final events of Christ's life.

Key Stage Three pupils celebrate Year group Mass in the school chapel usually in the first term.

St. Mary's is hosted by St Teresa's parish for our annual Christmas Carol service during Advent each year. This is a spiritual celebration with students, staff and the local community invited to attend.

Prayer services and liturgies take place both in class and in common with other members of the Year group.

Important school events are marked with religious input and significance.  
e.g., Year 12 Leavers' Prayer Service & Year 14 Leavers' Mass.

***This policy & approach will be reviewed on an annual basis.***

***O GOD, WE THANK YOU FOR THE LIFE OF EDMUND RICE.  
HE OPENED HIS HEART TO CHRIST, PRESENT IN THOSE  
OPPRESSED BY POVERTY AND INJUSTICE.***

***MAY WE FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE OF  
FAITH AND GENEROSITY.***

***GRANT US THE COURAGE AND COMPASSION OF BLESSED EDMUND AS  
WE SEEK TO LIVE LIVES OF LOVE AND SERVICE.***

**APPROVALS**

<b>APPROVALS</b>	
<b>Principal:</b>	
<b>Chair of the Board of Governors:</b>	
<b>Date of Approval by Governors:</b>	
<b>Date of next annual review:</b>	