

School Advisory Councils

Commissioning and Blessing Ceremonies



MELBOURNE
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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Why is a commissioning service significant?

When a brand-new ship is ready to set sail, it is 'commissioned'. The event is arranged by the ship's builders and shareholders, and serves as a public declaration that the vessel is seaworthy and ready for the voyage. The commissioning is the launching point of the ship's active service.

The Church has a rich tradition of recognising ministry. People have been prepared, recognised and trained to fulfil particular ministries so that as individuals they know that what God initiated has been recognised by the body of Christ. Congregations often take time in their worship services to commission people and dedicate things to be used by the Church.

For the most part, these ministries have been confined to the life of the gathered Church and so it has been tempting to think that the Church has 'ministers' – who do get recognised, and then 'the others' – who don't.

However, as outlined in *Working Together in Mission*, 'Catholic education is a key ministry of the parish' (p. 17). Furthermore, it is clear that: 'Each school community presents a unique context for ministry, and the relationship between the ... key leaders in the school provides a foundation for discerning how best to respond to the pastoral needs of the students, their families and the staff in the school' (p. 12). This is affirmed in Section 3 of the MACS Terms of Reference for School Advisory Councils, which asserts that: 'Serving on the School Advisory Council of a Catholic school is a form of Church lay ministry.'

As the MACS *Statement of Mission* notes that Catholic education 'is a co-responsible task led by every member of the Catholic school community', it is apt that service on a School Advisory Council is marked by some form of symbolic 'co-missioning' moment, such as a blessing or ceremony. The ceremony for the blessing and commissioning of members of the School Advisory Council is intended to take place at a time suitable for local context. It may be a liturgy, Mass or paraliturgical service to take place in either parish or school:

- at the eucharistic liturgy on Sunday during National Volunteer Week
- at Mass at another time when the parish or school celebrates ministry
- outside Mass, perhaps with the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours
- at a simple commissioning service prior to the first meeting
- in front of the school community at the start/end-of-year Mass.

A commissioning service can and should be a momentous and celebratory time. It will be so if its purpose and process are communicated to the participants beforehand.

The purpose of a commissioning or blessing is to emphasise that all of God's people have ministry in common, that a Catholic school is eucharistic in character and that service on a School Advisory Council is a form of lay ministry. A fruitful sign of the living witness of faith with parents and parishes is the participation of students and families in the life, mission and work of the local faith community, especially in the call to worship God and to serve the poor and marginalised (Acts 2: 42–47).

Models for use as the basis of a blessing or commissioning ceremony for School Advisory Council members, when celebrated outside the Eucharist, incorporated into a prayer service or with the Celebration of the Word, can be found in a range of examples from the *Book of Blessings*. This can be accessed via the CEVN website under *Mission & Identity* / [Liturgy and Prayer](#) in Liturgy Help's 'Library' menu on the left-hand side, or most parishes will have hard copy editions in their sacristy.

