



School Advisory Councils

Role of an Association of Canonical Administrators



New statutes, but a continuing presence

From the 1950s onwards, the size and complexity of secondary schools being established in the Archdiocese of Melbourne generally meant that it was not possible for any parish working alone to establish a secondary college or provide the number of students necessary for it to function effectively. Over time, and as the need arose in growth areas of the Archdiocese, parishes in particular regions joined together to purchase land and form canonical associations to establish secondary colleges, at the time called 'regional colleges'. These schools are now all under the governance of Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) and referred to as 'MACS schools'.

Each of these canonical associations, called 'associations of canonical administrators', is a private juridic person in accordance with Canon 116 of the *Code of Canon Law*, set up by a decree of the Archbishop and governed by a clearly defined set of statutes. The members are the parish priests,¹ moderators of pastors in solidum² or parochial administrators,³ duly appointed to administer the member parishes as outlined in the statutes. These parish priests are collectively the canonical administrators that owned the regional colleges and were responsible for the school operations.

A continuing role

As a result of the transfer of governance arrangements, it was acknowledged that the role of the association and the parish priests of the member parishes has changed, moving from priests being responsible for governance, employment and other duties involved in conducting schools to focusing on being the custodians of the mission of schools. In November 2020, all the associations met individually and approved the new replacement statutes of the associations which took effect from 1 January 2021. These were presented to the Archbishop for ratification, recording the changes to the continuing role of the associations following the transfer of the schools to MACS.

The renewed role of the associations that previously owned and governed schools throughout the Archdiocese of Melbourne, as defined in their individual statutes, is six-fold:

1. To act as custodian of the mission and patrimony of the school.
2. To assist in the appointment of the principal and Religious Education leader under the provisions of the Archdiocese that from time to time regulate these appointments.
3. To approve any major changes in the nature of the school.
4. To give consent, prior to the request for permission from the ordinary, for the erection of an oratory in the school.
5. To regulate divine worship in an oratory in the school.
6. To approve major alterations to buildings, the erection of new buildings or other major changes to land.

¹ Canon 515 §1.

² Canon 517 §1.

³ Canon 539.



Custodians of mission

By virtue of being appointed to one of the constituent parishes of an association, a priest becomes a member of the association. In that sense, the Archbishop already knows of the office, but it would be courtesy for the president of the association to draw to the attention of the Archbishop and the MACS Executive Director that a new priest has taken up duties in the association and, therefore, as a custodian of mission in the relevant MACS school. In their role as custodians of mission, the parish priest members – jointly, the canonical administrators in each association – have a duty to serve their college community by providing pastoral outreach to its families and students. The pastoral outreach exercised by canonical administrators has a different focus and shape given the age of the students and the nature of secondary education. The canonical administrators work collaboratively with the principal as custodians of the college's mission and Catholic identity. Canonical administrators play a key role in the school's liturgies and year-level retreats, staff faith formation programs, family outreach and other forms of pastoral ministry.

Custodians of the patrimony of the school

In most instances, the land and buildings used by regional colleges are owned by the association of parishes that established the college and, as with parish primary schools, ownership of the land did not transition to MACS when the governance transfer took place. For these colleges, the parish priests as representatives of the parishes that are beneficial owners of land are canonically custodians of the patrimony of the parishes. It is in this sense they are custodians of the patrimony of the school – the land and buildings destined for the long-term security of the member parishes. As per the statutes, the association of canonical administrators must approve major alterations to buildings, erection of new buildings and other major changes to land. Consideration of use of school space outside normal Catholic education purposes requires agreement between the principal as the MACS delegate and the canonical association on behalf of the member parishes. Agreement will need to be reached with the parishes and MACS for any proposals for a school to make use of parish space.

In some instances, land has been purchased using school moneys and the canonical association does not own all the land on which the college is operated. In these instances, land ownership matters still require full resolution, but the priests comprising the association which owned and operated the school prior to its transfer to MACS remain the custodians of mission for the college.

The president

The members of the canonical association form a collegial body which elects one of its members as the president to act on behalf of the association. As a private association of the faithful, it is independent and does not require ratification of an appointment that it makes; however, the association needs to inform the Archbishop and the MACS Executive Director when it has elected a president, as that person represents and acts on behalf of the association.

The president of the association of canonical administrators has a coordinating role, and provides a primary point of contact and support for the principal in all matters that relate to the role of the association members as custodians of mission. The president ensures that meetings occur with and among the association's members, thus enabling them to contribute effectively to the advancement of the school's Catholic mission and life. The president works with the principal to identify opportunities for the involvement of association members in the life of the college, including: membership of the senior leadership selection panels, inclusion in school reviews, membership of the School Advisory Council and participation in the principal's professional review.

In MACS schools, an ex-officio role on the School Advisory Council is reserved for a representative of the canonical association. This can be the president as the person formally acting on behalf of the association, but it may also be another member if so determined by the association. The level of involvement of all members of the association with the School Advisory Council is determined

locally. This is done in consultation with all members of the association and the principal, and outlined in the school's School Advisory Council Terms of Reference.

The life of the school and parishes

As is the case in parish primary schools, parish priests who are members of a canonical association will be welcomed into the life of a secondary school by the principal and will be kept appropriately informed of all important matters. Regular meetings of the association of canonical administrators with the principal and the college leadership team enable relationships to be built that provide a foundation for the college's Catholic life and mission.

The president represents the association and acts on its behalf, and in doing so needs to follow the canonical rules that apply to decision-making in the association. The president needs to ensure he has the support of the members of the association prior to signing off on capital works for land that is jointly owned by the member parishes. This is part of the commitments under the *School Transition Agreement* (STA) and *Right to Use Land and Buildings Agreement* (RULBA) between MACS and the association, and such matters should be appropriately dealt with at MACS' level not school level.

A representative of the association participates in the selection panels for the appointment of principal and Religious Education leader, and may also be part of the panels for deputy principal and other senior leadership positions. He can participate in other selection processes for leaders of a school by common agreement with the principal and, in all cases, consensus for appointments is the objective.

The associations of canonical administrators continue to play a significant role in the schools that their parishes established and, along with the School Advisory Councils, play an important role in overall flourishing of Catholic education in Melbourne.