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Marino Institute of Education, Dublin

Book of Abstracts

Keynote 1: *From Compact to Cosmos: Reimagining Catholic Education for a Connected World*

Dr Aiveen Mullally

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This paper explores the relevance of Pope Francis's Global Compact on Education (2019) in light of Thomas Berry's three principles of the universe – differentiation (diversity), subjectivity(interiority) and communion(community). It argues that the Global Compact offers Catholic educators and researchers a transformative framework for renewing the mission of Catholic education in a world marked by fragmentation, inequality and ecological crisis. Drawing on Berry's cosmological vision, the paper proposes that Catholic education must reflect the vital patterns of creation itself: honouring diversity and the uniqueness of every child (differentiation), nurturing the inner landscape of our students (interiority) and fostering community and ecological solidarity (communion). The paper calls us to reimagine Catholic education, not as a self-contained system, but as 'a global covenant of care' (Laudato Si) – a living expression of hope, justice and interconnectedness. In aligning our educational practice with both the Gospel and the cosmos, Catholic education can become a vital force for human and planetary flourishing.

Aiveen Mullally is a lecturer in Religious Education at undergraduate and postgraduate level in Marino Institute of Education. She is director of the Centre for Religious Education and course leader for the Masters in Christian School Leadership Online. Her research focuses on inclusive religious education, religious diversity in the Irish educational system, teacher identity and the voice of the child regarding religious education.

Keynote 2: The Global Compact on Education: Learning to Hope

Dr. Sandra Cullen

School of Human Development, Dublin City University

Pope Francis' 2020 initiative the *Global Compact on Education* (GCOE) has the potential to be one of the most exciting developments in Catholic education since the Second Vatican Council. Emerging from the theological vision underpinning *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, the GCOE articulates the educational commitments necessary to respond to the twin challenges of an integral ecology: the building of human fraternity and care for the earth as our common home. The concept of a global compact on education is not unique to the Catholic church. The 2021 UNESCO document, *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*, roots the purposes of education in a vision of what it means to be human in a shared world. Both UNESCO and Pope Francis eschew individualism and utilitarianism in favour of engaging with evolving traditions of humanism as sources for understanding the educational imperative. This paper reflects on some of the apparent commonalities between UNESCO's commitments and the commitments underpinning the GCOE – a new humanism, the intrinsic value of education, the common good, dialogue and partnership. It then goes on to suggest that in its articulation of a vision of education that can speak to the language of UNESCO and therefore be understood and critiqued in the public space, the GCOE shifts the emphasis from Catholic education to a Catholic vision of education that has something valuable to contribute to public discourse. Finally, the paper will suggest that the most significant element of what a Catholic vision of education, through the GCOE, offers to public discourse is the eschatological turn inherent in its underlying theological premises. In describing education as 'an act of hope', the GCOE makes it possible to work out some of the implications of what the dictum 'learning to hope' adds to UNESCO's vision of education as learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

Sandra Cullen is Associate Professor of Religious Education and former Head of the School of Human Development at the Institute of Education, DCU. As Director of the ICRE (Irish Centre for Religious Education), Sandra has a public profile in engagement with policy developments in RE, supporting teaching and learning in RE in a variety of contexts, and building international research networks.

Abstracts for Paper Presentations

1. Stephen J McKinney (1)

Pope Francis, Preferential option for the poor and the Global Compact on Education

The Global Compact is an outward facing and inclusive document that reflects the concerns of Pope Francis for the Church and the wider world. Arguably, this Global Compact on Education revisited some of the prominent ideas from *Gravissimum Educationis* about education for all and the primary role of parents in the family. However, in addition, the Global Compact adopted ideas from *Laudato si'* and affirmed the central idea of integral ecology as an essential component of education. It is also, in many respects, very consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals and, as such, reflects the aim of Francis to advocate for the preservation and sustainable future of the world. There is another theme that prevails in the Global Compact and that is the preferential option for the poor. The preferential option for the poor was a major part of his ministry, and daily witness, as a Jesuit priest and as pope. This paper provides an initial exploration of the links between the understanding of Pope Francis on the preferential option for the poor and the descriptions of the seven commitments in the Global Compact on Education.

Stephen J. McKinney is a Professor in the School of Education, University of Glasgow. He has worked in Catholic Education for over thirty years. In the University of Glasgow, he has been the Head of Department of Religious Education (2008-2010), the leader of a research and knowledge group, *Creativity, Culture and Faith* (2012-2017), the leader of a research and teaching group, *Pedagogy, Praxis and Faith* (2017-2022) and the acting leader of a research and teaching group, *Culture, Literacies, Inclusion and Pedagogy* (2024-). Professor McKinney is a member of the European Educational Research Association Council, the President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the London School of Management Education. He is on the steering group for the Network for Researchers in Catholic Education. Professor McKinney is the past President of the Scottish Educational Research Association. Currently, he is on the Editorial Board of the *Pastoral Review*, *International Studies in Catholic Education*, *Journal of Religious Education*, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* and the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*. His research interests include Catholic schools and faith schools, the impact of poverty on education and social justice and he has published more than 285 research articles, books, book chapters, book reviews, research reports and research briefings. This includes major edited books such as McKinney, S.J. and McCluskey, R. (eds) (2019) *A History of Catholic Education and Schooling in Scotland: New Perspectives*, Palgrave MacMillan and McKinney, S.J., O'Loughlin, T. & Tóth, T. (eds.) (2024) *Synodality and the Recovery of Vatican II. A New Way for Catholics*. Dublin: Messenger Publications. He has co-edited five special editions of the *Journal of Religious Education* with Dr Sean Whittle.

2. Simon Uttley

Viewing the earth from space: a fresh look at the evaluation of school life, mission, and religious education in the English Catholic school in the light of designing and delivering an evaluative framework for UK and Irish schools in the Quaker tradition.

The evaluation of Catholic life and mission, collective worship and religious education within English Catholic schools offers stakeholders the opportunity to assess performance, identify areas for development, and implement change initiatives. It is strengthened by external inspection, which, while distinctive to the Catholic school in terms of content, also reflects a structure familiar from the state schools' accountability watchdog, the Office for Standards in Education. In parallel, drawing on the author's work in designing and deploying the first-ever UK and Ireland Quaker school model evaluation framework, this paper reflexively examines what can be learnt by taking this 'view of the earth from outer space' – in other words, using the epistemic and cultural 'distance' between the two sectors to gain a fresh perspective. Adopting the insider positionality perspective, the paper outlines the 'Quaker school project', examining the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of self-evaluation and the process of forming judgements as a tool for improvement. The paper finds that the co-creation of the evaluative structure, along with the inclusion of bespoke foci tailored to specific settings, yields positive outcomes in terms of stakeholder support.

Simon Uttley is Headteacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic school in Reading and has been a Headteacher for twenty years. He is a professor of Catholic education at the University of Notre Dame (USA), London and an Honorary professor of Catholic education at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Following philosophy at Oxford university, Simon's doctoral work centred on authenticity in education, informed by the notion of Aletheia and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger applied to Catholic education. A licensed Catholic schools' inspector, Simon leads Koinonia Educational and is also the Co-Founder and Executive Co-Chair of the Slovak Educational Leadership Conference.

3. Bob Bowie

The global compact commitment of listening to the young in spiritual development: some findings from NICER spirituality research projects

This paper is inspired by the Global Compact on education; in particular, its challenge to put the human person at the centre that “integrates and respects all aspects of the person” (2019) in its “intellectual, scientific, artistic, athletic, political, business and charitable dimensions” with a key commitment to listen to voices of children and young people. Typically, religious education in Catholic contexts follows a top-down approach with an emphasis on tradition transmission an orientation that matches an educational philosophy that prioritises knowledge rich direct teaching in English school policy. Spiritual development in Catholic schools may also follow a similar top-down approach with spiritual practices transmitted to the young. While tradition transmission and rich knowledge will both remain important and necessary features of a Catholic Education, this paper considers whether the recognition of the Global compact commitment of listening to the young requires a rebalancing to include a more attentive stance to young people in their religious and spiritual education. In that vein, this paper presents research undertaken by NICER that foregrounded listening to children and spiritual flourishing in Schools of a Christian character, Roman Catholic and Church of England and reflects on what can be gained from such a stance.

Professor Bob Bowie is Director of NICER (<https://nicernews.substack.com/>) a university research centre at Canterbury Christ Church University. He is Deputy Editor of the International Journal of Christianity and Education, Trustee of Culham St Gabriel's Trust and the International Symposium for Religion Education and Values, and the designated UK Lead for the EU COST Orbit network on anti-religious bullying. His most recent article is 'Charting the hermeneutical turn, its impact on religious education curricula and developing principles for pedagogy' <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-025-00270-7>

4. Trevor Papworth

Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Parables, and Poetic Imagination in Religious Education

This research explores the impact of engaging secondary school students in writing original poetry in response to the parables of Jesus within Religious Education (extra-curricular). In a curriculum increasingly shaped by the EBacc, where RE and the arts are marginalised, this study proposes poetry-making as a theologically rich pedagogy to motivate students to read the Bible. Drawing on Pope Francis's address *The Global Aesthetics of the Catholic Imagination* (27/05/2023), which states that "art is an antidote to the mindset of calculation and standardisation," the research challenges the dominant neoliberal educational paradigm and gestures towards a more human, imaginative, and spiritually aware alternative.

This alternative, values meaning-making through making poems from the parables, and the "revolutionary energy" of the Gospel, which Pope Francis calls artists to express because the Church (and arguably schools) must "protest, call out and shout." The study treats the parables as open texts that invite moral questioning and personal interpretation. Through a phenomenological methodology, it explores the lived experiences of students (Years 7–9) as they read parables, interpret them, and make poetry from them. It also investigates their motivations for reading the Bible and engaging with scripture, and touches upon the impact on RE and Biblical literacy and reading habits. This presentation will share early findings from semi-structured interviews and student work.

Dr Trevor Papworth is an EDD student at St Mary's, Twickenham. After completing a PhD in Chemistry and post doctoral work in Spain, I completed a PGCSE at Bristol University. After three years of teaching in London, two years teaching in Mexico I returned to the UK to teaching in central London. After a further three years of teaching I received - what I can only describe - as a calling into Catholic education. I became a Deputy Head at St Thomas More Language College and completed the MA Catholic Leadership at SMUC in 2008. The experience planted the seeds for wanting to do a doctorate in Catholic education, particularly in encouraging students to read and specifically read the Bible. I have been the Head teacher of STMLC since 2010.

5. Elaine Arundell

CATS and the Global Compact: Using Song to Place the Whole Person at the Heart of Catholic Education

This paper responds to the NfRCE conference call to engage urgently with the Global Compact on Education by offering a case study from primary Religious Education. Centred on four of Pope Francis's commitments—placing the human person at the centre, listening to the voices of children, welcoming the vulnerable, and safeguarding our common home—this research explores the potential of *CATS* (Creative Approach to Song) as a pedagogical tool for social justice. Drawing on a participatory, phenomenological methodology and informed by Lundy's model of pupil voice, the project examines how song can become a catalyst for cognitive, affective, social, expressive and transformative learning. Early analysis indicates that *CATS* fosters empathy, agency, and solidarity, while developing skills of collaboration and advocacy—qualities that echo the GCE's vision for an integral human ecology. By blending the theological foundations of Catholic social teaching with the immediacy and inclusivity of music/song, this work invites educators to consider how creative practice might renew Catholic education's commitment to the common good.

Elaine Arundell is an independent researcher and consultant working in Religious Education and RSHE, with a particular interest in the intersections of pedagogy, theology, and creative practice. Her doctoral research explores how song can be used as a pedagogical tool for Religious Education and social justice, integrating aesthetic and theological dimensions of learning. Alongside being a part time primary school teacher and Lead for Relationships and Sex Education within her school, Elaine serves as Joint Secretary of the Executive Committee of AULRE (Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education) and is Executive member of ATCRE (Association of Teachers of Catholic Religious Education).

6. Eloi Aran, Anna Eva Jarabo, Fr Àngel Jesús Navarro and Miguel Àngel Pulido-Rodríguez

Inclusive Spirituality and the Global Compact on Education: A Transformative Pedagogical Proposal

This paper seeks to explore how inclusive spirituality, understood as a dimension of dialogic learning, contributes to fulfilling the aims of the Global Compact on Education. It examines the potential of Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) to transform educational environments by promoting shared meaning-making, emotional well-being, social friendship, and improvement of learning. Despite growing interest in spiritual development within Catholic education, few empirical studies have addressed how inclusive, dialogically grounded spiritual practices relate to transformative learning. The Global Compact emphasizes human dignity, peace, and solidarity—values that resonate with dialogic education but remain underexplored in practice. A participatory qualitative approach with a communicative orientation has been used. The study includes dialogic observations and interviews in four educational communities where SEAs are being implemented. The data to be presented in this paper corresponds to fieldwork conducted in a parish school working with students at risk of social exclusion. Participants include students, families, teachers, and community members. The analysis highlights how spiritual meaning is co-constructed in dialogic spaces. Findings indicate that SEAs foster a form of inclusive spirituality that supports the seven commitments of the Global Compact: promoting the dignity of the person, listening to young people, advancing women, empowering families, welcoming the vulnerable, creating a new economy, and safeguarding the environment. The study provides new evidence on the relationship between dialogic pedagogy and spiritual transformation. It affirms the potential of SEAs to foster inclusive spirituality as a tool for cultivating human flourishing, intercultural understanding, and the transformative goals of the Global Compact on Education.

Eloi Aran is an architect and theologian; PhD candidate in Education Sciences; Head of Identity and Mission at FECC.

Dr Miguel Àngel Pulido-Rodríguez is a Professor at the Faculty of Psychology, Education and Sport Sciences, Blanquerna–Universitat Ramon Llull and coordinator of pastoral activities.

7. Eloi Aran, Marta Burguet and Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez

Curricular Identity and Care for the Whole Person as Tools for Advancing the Commitments of the Global Compact on Education

The Fundació Escola Cristiana de Catalunya (FECC), an organisation that includes over 380 Catholic educational centres under religious or diocesan ownership, has created in 2025 two strategic working groups: the Group of Experts on Curricular Identity and the Group of Experts on the Global Care for the Person. Both are designed as tools to help achieve the commitments of the Global Compact on Education, and are embedded at the core of the 2023 Strategic Document on Identity and Mission of the FECC. This paper will present educational impact evidence showing how linking Catholic identity to the school curriculum, along with a holistic approach to the care of the person, contributes in transversal ways to fulfilling the seven commitments of the Global Compact on Education. The Group of Experts on Curricular Identity already has a three-year trajectory and has co-developed a transversal framework for Evangelising Education in both compulsory and post-compulsory schooling. This framework, known as the EDU&EVA curriculum (Educació Evangelitzadora), offers a coherent and context-sensitive approach to strengthening Catholic identity through education. It aligns Catholic educational values with the official competence-based curriculum defined by the Spanish LOMLOE law and the OECD Learning Compass 2030, ensuring coherence with broader educational policies. Beyond doctrine and moral formation, EDU&EVA expands its scope to include cultural identity, personal meaning, and social transformation—dimensions that are central to the Global Compact on Education. This committee brings a scientifically grounded and socially engaged perspective fully aligned with the core values of the Global Compact on Education. By showing how two concrete structures—curricular identity and global care—are being developed as strategic levers for transformation in Catholic schools, this contribution reinforces the urgency of prioritising the Global Compact on Education. It highlights how the Pact can be embodied in institutional action, while remaining faithful to the Catholic mission and engaging critically and creatively with contemporary educational challenges.

Eloi Aran is an architect and theologian; PhD candidate in Education Sciences; Head of Identity and Mission at FECC.

Dr Marta Burguet is a Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona; Head of the FECC Expert Group on Global Care for the Person.

Dr Miguel Ángel Pulido-Rodríguez is a Professor at the Faculty of Psychology, Education and Sport Sciences, Blanquerna–Universitat Ramon Llull and coordinator of pastoral activities.

8. David Torvell

Learning Nothing is Everything: King Lear, Personhood and the Importance of Great Literature in Catholic Education

In July 2024 Pope Francis wrote that literature offers a training for discernment, honing the capacity to gain insight into one's own interiority besides being a path along the truth of one's own being. A popular educational trope is 'You can be anything you want to be'. This paper challenges the 'wisdom' of this assertion and with particular reference to Shakespeare's *King Lear* argues that great literature can assist us in discovering who we *really* are. Nothing. Lear's stripping of his regal clothes amounts to a wider stripping of his authority, land and self. He painstakingly comes to realize he is 'nothing' after his traumatic but transformative experience on the heath. This is the beginning of his redemption. My paper traces his life changing experience as he dons the robe of glory at his daughter's and his own death.

David Torevell is Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Liverpool Hope University, UK and Visiting Professor at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. He was previously Honorary Research Fellow at Leeds Trinity University, UK and taught in secondary schools for seventeen years before entering HE. He has written various book chapters and has edited eleven volumes on ethics besides publishing widely in international journals. His research interests are: Catholic theology/ philosophy, Catholic education, theology and literature, Christianity & the arts and sport & religion.

9. Caroline Healy and John Lydon

Handing on the Baton from Religious to Lay Leadership in a Post-Vatican II Council Context – an Exercise in Collaborative Ministry reflected in the Experience of one Religious Order

In the twelfth chapter of the conciliar document on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, it states that this same sacred synod, while professing its gratitude to priests, Religious men and women, and the laity who by their evangelical self- dedication are devoted to the noble work of education and of schools of every type and level". While the first formal ecclesial acknowledgement (SCCE 1977:75) of the impact of the decline in the number of religious teaching in Catholic schools would not be referenced until twelve years after the closure of the Council, there is a tacit recognition of the importance of collaborative ministry between lay and religious colleagues in furthering the Catholic Church's education mission. This paper will trace the development of this collaborative ministry in a post-Vatican II context,

retrieving both ecclesial and scholarly literature. Concepts such as “handing on the baton” as opposed to a “paternalistic Paradigm” will be investigated, alongside an analysis of the development of an increased emphasis on the importance of dialogue and solidarity with lay professionals. The word co-responsibility is used and is contrasted with the isolationism, the “enclosed garden”, of the past, resulting a formal commitment to the promotion of shared responsibility with lay collaborators in the adoption of an adequate formation in the characteristic spirit of the order. The paper will conclude by articulating historical and contemporary research in relation to the extent to which the religious order in question continues to develop innovative ways of engaging lay colleagues in nourishing its distinctive vision.

Dr Caroline Healy is the course lead for the MA in Catholic School Leadership. She is an elected member of the Council of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, to advance Catholic education in the wider public arena. Her current research interests concern formation of Catholic school teachers and leaders.

Professor John Lydon KC*HA, SFHEA holds degrees in education and theology from the Universities of Durham, Liverpool and Surrey. His doctorate focused on teaching as a vocation for lay teachers in a contemporary context. As well as teaching at the University of Notre Dame, London Global Gateway, he is Professor of Catholic Education, and Editor of the leading journal *International Studies in Catholic Education*, St Mary’s University, London. Significant areas of John Lydon’s scholarship and research focus on spiritual capital, Catholic school leadership, the maintenance of distinctive religious charisms and the relationship between these and competing school paradigms in the 21st century which focus on the marketization of education and school effectiveness in the UK.). He is also currently part of an exciting philanthropic-funded research project concerning the research capacity-building of post-doctoral researchers from Africa. John Lydon is a sought-after speaker and regularly delivers lectures in the United States, especially at NCEA, but also Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. John was recently recognised as Multidisciplinary Expert and appointed Leader of the thematic group for education of the Catholic-Inspired NGO Forum, working in partnership with the Vatican Secretariat of State. He has also been selected as a distinguished international partner with the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (GRACE) with Australia, Ireland and the United States. Most recently he was appointed International Visiting Professor of the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines. He is a member of the Executives of the World Union of Catholic Teachers, the Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges of England & Wales and the Catholic Union of Great Britain. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

10. Ryan McAleer

The Catholic Dialogue School: Lessons for Northern Ireland

While the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998 brought an end to three decades of political violence in Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism still marks many aspects of the region's society. The education system regularly comes under particular criticism for hampering progress in the promotion of a shared society, since Protestants and Catholics remain, largely, educated separately. With little prospect of structural change and no appetite on the part of faith-based schools to question the status quo, this paper tentatively explores an approach that could begin to reimagine how Catholic education is delivered in the current, socio-cultural context. Recognising dialogue as an essential category for theology today can help recontextualise Catholic education in Northern Ireland in a way that embraces the challenges of a post-secular, post-Christian context, while also actively contributing to the aspirations of the peace process. Indeed, in his *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, Pope Francis emphasised the importance of education for “constructive dialogue” within his wider educational vision. Lessons from the model of the ‘Catholic Dialogue School’ practiced in countries like Belgium, Australia, and parts of the USA, can enable Irish Catholic school leadership to engage more directly and sincerely with current debates on education. Building upon this model for a post-conflict, religiously divided society such as Northern Ireland can also challenge school leadership to be open to alternative structures that are potentially more culturally and politically plausible. Far from threatening the valuable place of faith-based education or advocating for so-called ‘neutral’ educational institutions, a *dialogical approach* to education can attend to the formation of religious-cultural identity but in spaces that positively and constructively engage with the religious-cultural other.

Ryan McAleer is a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven. Involved with the Enhancing Catholic School Identity project and the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies, his research explores the systematic theological-philosophical foundations for a vision of the ‘Catholic Dialogue School’ in the post-secular, post-Christian, and post-conflict context of Northern Ireland. ryan.mcaleer@kuleuven.be

11. Maurice Harmon, Jacqui Wilkinson, Aiveen Mullally and Cora O’Farrell

Listening to Children in Faith-Based Schools: A Study of Religious Education in Irish Primary Classrooms

This paper explores children’s perspectives on religious education (RE) within ten Irish primary schools of a Christian ethos, foregrounding the voices of pupils from 3rd to 6th class. Grounded in the Global Compact on Education’s call to “listen to the voice of children and young people,” and aligned with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1989), the research adopts a child-centred framework that positions pupils as active participants in their educational journey. A key component of the study involved the administration of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, a well-established 24-item instrument assessing affective responses to five core aspects of the Christian tradition: God, Jesus, the Bible, church, and prayer. This scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity across a wide range of cultural and age contexts. In this study, the survey also gathered data on personal variables including sex and class level. In addition to quantitative measures, the study employed a range of participatory methodologies to foster authentic child voice and avoid tokenism in the research process. Findings presented in this paper draw on both quantitative and qualitative data. The mean agreement levels by theme from the Francis Scale were highest for Jesus (85%), followed by God (80%), prayer (78%), church (69%), and the Bible (66%) and evident in the following themes of the paper: children’s experiences of RE; their attitudes toward core teachings of Christianity; and children’s affective responses to faith teachings. The study highlights the importance of meaningful dialogue, respectful listening, and the active inclusion of children’s views in shaping educational practice—particularly in faith-based contexts.

Dr Maurice Harmon is Head of Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education and an Associate Professor of Education at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. Maurice lectures in religious education at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels at MIC and supervises students’ research at undergraduate, Masters and PhD levels. Maurice has extensive experience in primary education and his research interests include ethos in the development of the school system in Ireland, children’s rights, child voice, participatory based research, religious education, spirituality, pedagogy, curriculum development and education and the law. Maurice has published and presented widely across these areas.

Dr Jacqueline Wilkinson is a lecturer in Religious Education in DCU Institute of Education. She co-ordinates and delivers the Church of Ireland Religious Education certificate to BED students and to teachers employed in Church of Ireland schools. Her lecturing and research

interests include curriculum development in Religious Education, the attitudes of children toward Christianity, working with scripture in Religious Education, school assemblies and the ethos and identity of church schools.

12. Victoria Byrne

Empowering the Family: An Overview of Literature

This paper explores the parental perspective of Irish Catholic primary schools. The Global Compact on Education which was launched by Pope Francis in September 2019, listed seven commitments, the fourth commitment being: To empower the family. For this commitment to achieve its potential, a deeper understanding of the parental perspective is needed. To date in Ireland, there are only two significant pieces of research that explore parental views on Catholic schools in Ireland: Parental understanding of patronage (2011) and The Genesis Report (2019). The paper will present an overview of the literature that I have engaged with so far in my research. I will demonstrate, drawing from national and international research on parental involvement in Catholic education, that there is a gap in current research exploring how schools in Ireland today empower parents and families.

Victoria Louise Byrne is a PhD student in the School of Human Development in DCU under the supervision of Dr. Cora O'Farrell and Dr. David Kennedy. Victoria is currently the chaplain at Willow Park School, Blackrock.

13. Mary Mihovilović

The De-Autonomised Headteacher and openness to the most vulnerable and marginalised in the local context: A Paradox in Leadership

This paper explores commitment five of the Global Compact on Education in the setting of English state funded Catholic schools within Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts (CMATs) in which, it is argued, the role of the headteacher has been de-autonomised. Drawing on contemporary scholarship and the voices of Chief Executive Officers, Headteachers and Leaders of Catholic Life within these schools, it explores the implications of this systemic change on the challenges of welcoming and including all who are part of Catholic schools. Whilst there is very limited literature on CMATs, the problematisation of the impact of decentralisation on social justice is emerging as significant in the research into secular MATs and will be considered in the context of Catholic education. Headteacher research participants in CMATs identified various dimensions of inclusion, central to which were the complex challenges of achieving social justice for their own pupils whilst balancing those with working for it at system-level. Paradoxically, the benefits of belonging to a CMAT and the opportunities it affords schools to serve both local need and those of the wider community were also highlighted. If English Catholic schools are to live the openness and encounter with the other called for in Compact, this urgently requires research.

Dr Mary Mihovilović is Associate Professor and Associate Head of School, Postgraduate Taught Programmes in Education, at St Mary's University, London. She is an experienced secondary school teacher of Religious Education, middle and senior leader and was a headteacher for twelve years. She taught in five Catholic comprehensive schools serving diverse inner city, suburban and rural communities. She is currently engaged in researching the role of the CEO in CMATs. She is a Foundation Director of a diocesan Catholic Multi Academy Trust (CMAT) of twenty-six schools and is involved with CMAT developments nationally.

14. Stephen J McKinney (2)

Child Sex Abuse in Catholic Residential Schools in Canada and Scotland

Contemporary clerical child sex abuse has resulted in serious long term mental and physical illness for many of the victims and an ongoing scandal that has damaged the reputation of the Catholic church worldwide. Clerical child sex abuse and the inconsistent and often ineffective responses from the Catholic Church have been researched from a wide variety of perspectives: legal, ecclesial, sociological, psychological, theological and crisis management. This paper is focussed on the accounts of the circumstances of sexual abuse in some of the Catholic residential schools in Canada and Scotland, as represented in documentation from government inquiries. Two hermeneutical lenses are adopted to analyse these accounts and the response from the Catholic church to accusations of sex abuse in some of their institutions. First, the adoption of image repair theory from the perspective of crisis management and, second, from a Catholic theological perspective, the theology of the cross of Moltmann. This latter lens was applied by Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino to the context of late 20th century El Salvador and they argued that the oppressed people of El Salvador had to be taken down from the cross so that they could rise again. Similarly, the adults who were sexually abused as children now have to be taken down from the cross.

Stephen J. McKinney is a Professor in the School of Education, University of Glasgow.

15. Nicholas Cuddihy

Blessed are those who plant trees in whose shade they may never rest

Questions and concerns about the future of Patronage, Ownership, Management and Leadership of Catholic schools in Ireland have been a feature of our discourse for decades. In recent years, there has been a welcome and discernible shift in culture toward greater collaboration within and between Catholic Education Bodies. The evolution of relatively new structures such as the CEP and the APTCS have certainly supported this cultural change. Most notably of all, the publication of a number of research studies in Catholic education have moved the conversations on from anecdote, expressions of concern and a chorus of ‘something needs to be done’ towards a more evidence-based analysis and more courageous and specific recommendations for collaboration and action. This paper explores how some of these recent developments can be best understood by analogy with the climate debate.

Addressing 120 world leaders at the opening ceremony of COP 26 in 2021 none other than Boris Johnson added his unambiguous analysis to the well-established consensus. “Humanity has long since run down the clock on climate change. It’s one minute to midnight on that doomsday clock and we need to act now”. A recently published study by Horner Brown and Reed concludes that in terms of the doomsday clock for Catholic education in Australia, they have already reached one minute to midnight. Looking at the Grace report in more detail this paper suggests that if the schools in Ireland are our coalmines, then the teachers are the canaries. Drawing again on Horner Brown and Reed the paper notes how the fall-off in religiosity and belief among students in Irish schools may have been increasing for many years, but for the first time it appears that the teachers are now agreeing with them. The ice caps are melting; the coral is bleaching and the pool of young Catholic teachers from which we will draw the leaders of Catholic schools in the future is shrinking rapidly. The paper considers what an ultimate destination might be for our schools if this trajectory becomes embedded and irreversible. Climate scientists have drawn multiple projections and models which have helped focus the world’s attention on the urgency of the need for action. We need to be courageous in naming the likely scenarios for the future of our schools even if they are unpalatable. This will increase the appetite for change across the system and will help us to design and target interventions so that they will have maximum impact.

The paper concludes with three specific recommendations which could be delivered in the very short-term: a comprehensive system-wide census of school leaders, the introduction of a mandatory common induction programme for all newly appointed deputy principals and principals in Catholic schools, and the development of a self-evaluation tool for schools as a lens through which they can focus their attention on the Catholic Ethos and Identity of their school.

Dr. Nicholas Cuddihy has demonstrated a commitment to the advancement of Catholic education in his career as a catechist, a school leader, a strategist, a researcher and as the Chief Executive in Catholic trusts both in the UK and Ireland. He has recently established CESS, Catholic Education Supports and Services with the ambition and vision to enhance and support the work of Patrons and Trustees as a leading and respected provider of professional training, formation and support. In shaping CESS, Nicky has drawn heavily on his experience in the UK and Ireland and is inspired by the findings of the GRACE report and other important pieces of research. He is currently exploring how a framework for formative assessment and self-evaluation in Irish Catholic schools could affirm and support the work of Trusts, Boards and school leaders and ultimately help to secure a confident future for Catholic schools.

16. Roisin Coll (Full Paper)

'Caught and Taught? Parents' Role in Catholic Education'

This paper explores the role of the family in raising children in the Catholic faith today, drawing on both personal experience and scholarly reflection. Building on insights from Professor John Sullivan, particularly his chapter *Faith in the Family* from *Learning the Language of Faith* (2010), it considers how families can nurture faith within contemporary society.

Framed in the context of the Global Compact on Education, which identifies the parents as the first and primary educators of children, the paper examines how Catholic parents and caregivers can embody and transmit the values of faith, hope and charity in the home. While the reflections are autobiographical, they are informed by key Catholic texts and teaching, offering both practical and theological insights relevant to Catholic education today.

By connecting lived experience with the principles of the Global Compact, this paper highlights the centrality of the family in the multi-levelled landscape of Catholic education and its role in sustaining faith formation in future generations.

Roisin Coll is a Professor of Catholic Education at the University of Glasgow and currently Director of the St Andrew's Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education. The Foundation is central to the work of the University and is responsible for providing teachers for Catholic schools across Scotland. Working in close partnership with the Scottish Government, the General Teaching Council of Scotland and the Bishops' Conference of Scotland the director has oversight of the education of all aspiring Catholic teachers across the country. Roisin is the author of a range of articles, book chapters and a book on the discipline of Religious Education in the Catholic school sector. Her research interests include the professional development needs of teachers in Catholic schools which was the focus of my doctoral thesis. In addition to being a specialist in Religious Education, Roisin also leads and teaches across a range of intersectional education courses at both undergraduate and post graduate level. Roisin has taught and written widely in the field and her work is to be found in many international peer-reviewed journals. Her research has been of great interest to academics and she regularly invited to keynote in national and international contexts. The practical application of her work is also embraced by school educators and she frequently asked to explore the findings with those teaching and leading within schools.

17. Vivek da Silva (Full Paper)

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): Encouraging new ways of understanding LGBTQ+ realities to further a respect for and an enhancement of every person's identity.

Considering the principles of the Global Compact on Education, it is imperative that Catholic education encourages new ways of understanding contemporary realities of children and young adults especially those most vulnerable and marginalised, particularly those identifying with the LGBTQ+ community. There have been significant changes in Irish society in its understanding and expression of human sexuality (Nolan, 2018). There is an argument that Catholic ethos hinders the engagement with an effective RSE (O'Brien, 2019), and marginalises students identifying as LGBTQ+ in Catholic schools. This presentation recognises the tension that exists for Catholic schools to provide sensitive pastoral care while remaining true to Catholic teaching (Coll, 2021). This presentation proposes the need for Catholic Schools to have clarity about their understanding of human anthropology (Lane, 2015) as they determine their approach to RSE. In offering Trueman's (2020) critique of contemporary selfhood, as identity and sexuality are shaped by a view and a meaning constructed not by external realities such as religion, but by expressive individualism, it explores the need for robust dialogue (Boeve, 2019; Christus Vivit, 2019; Fratelli Tutti, 2020; The Identity of the Catholic School, 2022) between voices of religion and growing secular thought (Hogan, 2009; Taylor, 2011; West, 2011). The key challenge is to recognise the voice of religion, in a world that is simultaneously secular and religious (Hogan, 2009), as both critically essential and contested. Catholic education, seeking to make human persons the centre of every educational enterprise (Global Compact, 2019), focuses on inviting students into critical dialogue with faith and culture. It promotes an atmosphere that nurtures every student to realise their full potential, makes catholic schools welcoming places particularly to students who feel marginalised, excluded, rejected or not represented (Gravissimum Educationis, 1965; Educational Guidance in Human Love, 1983; Martin, 2021). It nurtures respect for every person enabling understanding and welcome through an openness and encounter with the other (Global Compact, 2019).

Vivek da Silva is an assistant professor in Religious Education in Dublin City University. He is a doctoral candidate researching in the area of Relationship and Sexuality Education in Post Primary Catholic Schools in Ireland. He is the Co-chair of the Laudato Si Working Group of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

18. Cora O'Farrell

Building Community Pacts: Service-Learning in Catholic Teacher Formation

Pope Francis' *Global Compact on Education* exhorts educators and all sectors of society to place the human person at the centre, foster participation and solidarity, and form new generations for service and dialogue. He calls for the courage to prepare individuals ready to offer themselves in service to the community. For those engaged in the preservice education of teachers, the question arises: is this aspiration viable, and how might it be implemented in practice?

This paper argues that service-learning (SL) pedagogy provides a concrete and practical response to the commitments of the *Global Compact on Education*. An overview of SL pedagogy is presented, followed by an examination of its defining features (Albanesi et al., 2021): integrating meaningful community service into the curriculum, awarding academic credit for the learning, addressing real-world problems, and placing reflection at the core. The paper then explores how SL might be adopted as a transformative approach within preservice teacher formation programmes in Catholic schools. Drawing on both educational theory and lived practice, it outlines the genesis of a pilot SL project for student teachers at Dublin City University commencing in the 2025/26 academic year. Finally, the paper reconnects this initiative with the *Global Compact on Education*, aligning the pilot project with Commitment 4 ("To Empower the Family"), which calls on educators to build community educational pacts between schools and families to meet local needs. In doing so, it demonstrates how SL can operationalise the vision of the Compact, equipping future teachers for service, dialogue, and the common good.

Dr Cora O'Farrell is Director of the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education at Dublin City University. She teaches Religious Education at undergraduate and postgraduate level and supervises doctoral candidates. She also contributes to various modules sharing her skills in the area of Contemplative Pedagogies and Narrative. Together with her academic work, Cora is also actively involved in service with a number of different organisations, such as Godly Play Ireland and Localise National Youth Volunteering Organisation.

19. Anna Eva Jarabo, Fr. Àngel Jesús Navarro and Miguel Àngel Pulido-Rodríguez
Towards a Pastoral Life in Catholic Universities in the Spirit of the Global Compact

This paper presents the conceptual and methodological foundations of the SACRU Working Group 8 (WG8), entitled “Personal and Social Impact of Formative Proposals Related to Faith and Spirituality in Higher Education”. The group began its work at the end of the 2024–2025 academic year and this paper outlines its most relevant foundations and lines of inquiry. WG8 brings together researchers and practitioners committed to fostering transformative and inclusive spiritual development in university contexts and is currently focused on defining a shared framework for action and evaluation. The Global Compact on Education calls for the renewal of education systems through care, accountability and dialogue. WG8 connects with this by focusing on exploring how Catholic universities can assess the social and personal impact of the spiritual and pastoral activities that take place as part of academic life, proposing a framework that places the spiritual accompaniment of students and staff at the heart of academic life, promoting a sense of belonging, interiority and commitment to the common good, among others. The methodological approach combines conceptual analysis with participatory inquiry. It draws on collaborative work developed within SACRU and on prospective case studies, particularly from Blanquerna-URL (Ramon Llull University, Barcelona), where the Area of Faith and Spirituality is preparing to evaluate future formative programmes through dialogic and participatory methods involving students, educators, and pastoral agents. Although the implementation phase has not yet begun, the paper will present the proposed structure for evaluating these initiatives. This includes projected data collection strategies such as focus groups, narrative self-assessment tools, and participatory evaluation workshops, all aimed at capturing the transformative potential of spiritual dialogue groups, interreligious encounters, and service-learning experiences. This contribution affirms the relevance of pastoral care as a field of innovation and mission within Catholic universities. Its significance lies in the capacity of pastoral care to generate both personal and social impacts that enhance not only the academic experiences of students and staff, but also the overall vitality and relational quality of university communities.

20. John Sullivan

Faith in the Family

In launching the Global Compact on Education, as one aspect of its focus on seven big issues of contemporary society, Pope Francis points to the need to see and to empower the family as the first and essential place of education. In his video message for the Global Compact he shares his vision of education as a matter of love and responsibility handed down from one generation to another, opening up new horizons in which hospitality, intergenerational solidarity and the value of transcendence can give birth to a new culture. What happens in the family provides a vital foundation (either supportive or antithetical) for later Catholic education in schools and universities. Despite the Church's constant emphasis on parents as the primary educators of their children, the role of the family continues to be relatively neglected in the literature on Catholic education, and, indeed, in the follow-up to the Global Compact. Many parents lack confidence with regard to their role as teachers of the faith. This paper aims to contribute to the process of restoring that confidence in parents and the empowering of the family, as called for by Pope Francis. Family life plays a crucial role in nurturing affective maturity, itself a platform for integral growth and learning later in life. The family functions as an environment for satisfying needs, for becoming socialized and for the learning of ideals, values and healthy attitudes towards the world. In this paper there are four steps. First, I explore what it means to call the home 'the domestic church'. Second, I suggest some foundations for faith that can be laid in the family. Third, attention is given to four types of ministry exercised by parents. Fourth, I end by commenting on how the marital relationship feeds into the healthy upbringing of children.

John Sullivan, Emeritus Professor of Christian Education, Liverpool Hope University

21. David Kennedy

From Ethical Vision to Educational Practice: Engaging Ricoeurian Hermeneutics in the Service of the Global Compact on Education

In 2019, Pope Francis launched the Global Compact on Education (GCE) in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The GCE (2019) was presented by Pope Francis as an invitation, a moral and cultural appeal for global educational reform aimed at fostering a more inclusive, fraternal, and humane society. The document proposes a vision for a new humanism founded on unity in difference, advocating for an educational approach that prioritises relationships, dialogue, and the belief that positive change is amenable. The ambitious vision of the GCE (2019) emphasises the need to: [i] place the individual at the centre of education, [ii] to invest in the best available resources, and [iii] to cultivate and form individuals dedicated to serving the community in a manner that is orientated towards "ecological citizenship" and a "revolution of tenderness". While the Congregation for Catholic Education has made efforts to support the reception and implementation of the GCE's (2019) ambitious vision by way of its 'Tools for Action' in 2021: [a] a Vademecum to guide educators in both formal and informal settings, [b] a book titled *Education between Crisis and Hope*, and [c] an exemplar outlining a blueprint for local level agreements to operationalise the Compact. Seven years since its launch, however, it is evident that the reception and implementation of the GCE's (2019) vision across both the UK and the ROI is one characterised by varying degrees of success. In an attempt to make a limited contribution to the reception and understanding of the GCE (2019), this paper raises the following question: what, if anything, might the hermeneutics of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, have to offer in the 'bridging of the gap' between the GCE's (2019) ethical vision and educational practice? In addressing this question, this paper contends that Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers a potential theoretical framework for many of the GCE's (2019) key aspirations, one that is philosophically robust and capable moving beyond the broad statements of GCE's (2019) vision to offer intricate models for educational practice and individual formation.

David Kennedy (BA, MA, Ph.D., SFHEA), Assistant Professor of Religious Education, joined the School of Human Development, Institute of Education, Dublin City University in 2019. David is also a teaching and research associate at the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education, Institute of Education, Dublin City University. David is also the creator, producer, and host of the podcast series, *Conversations from the Classroom with Dr David Kennedy* produced in association with DCU, Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education.

22. Fiona Dineen and Patricia Kiernan

'The same dignity and identical rights as men?' Gender and Catholicism: The Global Compact on Education

Pope Francis' emphasis on recognising that 'women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men' (*Fratelli Tutti*, 23) forms the subject matter of this paper. It overviews and engages in a critical reading of commitment three of the seven commitments of the Global Compact on Education (2019). The Global Compact, spear-headed by Pope Francis, as a dialogue initiative focused on creating a global alliance, encourages the full participation of girls and young women in education. For Pope Francis education was fundamentally about love and responsibility. Commitment number three is a pledge 'to advance the women' and involves educating girls and women not simply as individuals, but as a core aspect of transforming the world and furthering human solidarity and ecological responsibility. The Compact prioritises the removal of obstacles that inhibit the education of girls, especially females who are poor, refugees, migrants, or otherwise disadvantaged. It proposes that education should always be inherently inclusive and should guarantee equality of opportunity for girls and women while empowering them to participate fully in society at all levels and in all areas. The Global Compact on Education shares much in common with the UN Global Compact (2000) as well as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). The paper highlights the worrying gap between the Global Compact's aspirational language and commitment and the reality on the ground. The current context for an exploration of gender equality in Ireland involves increasing levels of femicide along with sexual violence against women. Globally, in 2024, 122 million girls did not have the opportunity to attend school (UNESCO 2024). The paper suggests that within the Catholic tradition, while the Compact represents a very welcome emphasis on gender inclusion, many voices contest the Catholic Church's track record and attitude to gender inclusion and equality within its own structures.

Fiona Dineen is a lecturer in Religious Education and a member of the Department of Learning, Society, and Religious Education at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Ireland. She lectures at undergraduate and postgraduate level on Initial Teacher Education programmes. Prior to taking up this position Fiona was Diocesan Advisor for Religious Education with the Diocese of Limerick and also taught for a number of years in a DEIS primary school setting. Her research interests and publications focus on Catholic education, religious education, educational policy development, Teacher Identity and Continuing Professional Development.

Patricia Kieran is a British Commonwealth and Foreign Office Chevening Scholar and Associate Professor of Religious Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of

Limerick, Ireland. She is Director of the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies. Her research focuses on Catholicism and the role of religion in the Irish educational system, inclusive religious education and approaches to teaching about beliefs and worldviews in faith schools.

23. Dr Aine Moran

Folláine Formation: A Catholic Leadership Model for Wholeness and Mission in Light of the Global Compact on Education

This paper explores the design and vision of the *Folláine Formation Programme*, a new six-month professional formation initiative for Catholic school leaders in Ireland. Drawing inspiration from the Irish term *folláine* (meaning wholeness, flourishing, and soundness), the programme is framed around values that speak to the Global Compact on Education's call for integral, relational, and value-driven education. Developed by Dr. Áine Moran, founding principal of Le Chéile Secondary School, current principal of Sancta Maria College and a doctoral graduate in Catholic education and leadership, the programme draws from a rich blend of practice, theology, and research. It is deeply responsive to Pope Francis' *Global Compact on Education*, which calls educators to centre the person, promote inclusion, foster dialogue, and renew relationships grounded in human dignity and the common good. Each month of the Folláine programme focuses on a leadership virtue - including Faith, Leadership, Áitíocht (radical hospitality), and Integrity - accompanied by tools for discernment, reflection, relational mapping, and mission planning. The structure draws on Catholic anthropology, various spiritual traditions, GRACE research, and the practical wisdom of school leadership. The paper will explore the conceptual framework of the programme and how it aims to foster ethical, faith-rooted leadership practice; support personal and communal discernment; cultivate inclusive, relational school cultures and embody Catholic anthropology in a secularising context. It will reflect on the urgent need for meaningful, culturally resonant formation pathways for Catholic leaders and how this programme responds to the GCE's call for new models of participation, encounter, and transformation in education. This paper will be of particular interest to scholars and practitioners engaged in formation that is theologically informed, educationally rigorous, and contextually responsive.

Dr. Áine Moran is co-founder of the Folláine Catholic education consultancy. She is the principal of a Catholic secondary school and holds a PhD in Catholic educational leadership.

24. Paul Corcoran

“For the parish to last ever more”: Killeagh and the spiritual capital of the Gaelic Athletic Association

This paper takes its title from the lyrics of Kishfishr’s “Killeagh”, the most popular song in Ireland in 2025 and an anthem to the enduring influence of the Gaelic Athletic Association in the Irish imagination. This influence has historically been intertwined with that of the Catholic Church, most notably in the demarcation of Catholic parishes – and GAA clubs – along the same geographical boundaries. The “one parish, one club” model has loosened over time, but has had the undoubted effect of cultivating fierce local allegiances to “the parish” – a concept which in the Irish imagination holds both sporting and religious connotations. In a rapidly secularizing Ireland, the idea of the GAA taking on the role of surrogate religion is ever more plausible. Commentators have noted how the community ethos of the GAA (“where we all belong” according to its motto) has provided a sense of identity and meaning in the increased absence of participation in organised religion. The rampant and unexpected success of “Killeagh” – a GAA ode to “the parish” cast in surprisingly religious terms – is a cultural moment that invites reflection on where a new generation of Irish will turn in their search for belonging.

Dr Paul Corcoran lectures in Religious Education at Marino Institute of Education. His rich research background includes degrees in Ancient Greek, History, Education, Classics (Latin) and theology. His PhD in Religious Studies at the Loyola Institute at Trinity College Dublin focused on wonder and sacramentality in the work of Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh. His research interests reflect his diverse background and centre on the interdisciplinary possibilities for the disciple of religion and religious education in a modern landscape. His research output has sought to put religion into an open-minded and clear-eyed conversation with the spheres of philosophy, politics, literature and the arts.

25. Denis Robinson

Transcendence and Transformation: The Vision of the Person at the Heart of Catholic Education

This paper will address some issues raised in the Global Compact on Education: that education is meant to be transformative. It introduces the value of transcendence that can give birth to a new culture, to make human persons in their value and dignity the centre of every educational programme, both formal and informal, in order to foster their distinctiveness, beauty and uniqueness, and their capacity for relationship with others. A basic fact is that there is no such thing as a value neutral education. All education is underpinned by a particular vision of what it means to be human and it likewise advocates a particular understanding of the nature and function of education. Therefore, for better or worse, and whether people are conscious of it or not, a school will reflect a particular philosophy, anthropology, sociology, theology, spirituality, and cosmology that will directly and indirectly influence the education, personal formation, values and world view of students and staff. Schooling involves a lot more than providing an academic education, it incorporates, shapes and expresses how people feel, think and act, it influences their values, what they believe and how they see themselves in the world. As an inherent element of a school, ethos has a lasting influence on a school community because the spontaneous, natural internalisation of a characteristic spirit will impact the quality of their lives, their learning and their relationships in the present and how they will live in the future. It has to be said that we are confident in educating the mind, teaching critical reasoning, imparting knowledge, empowering students with information and learning strategies. Good and necessary as this is, the human heart needs more to flourish and discover the phenomenal transcendent and transformative potential within. No matter how beneficial it is, learning remains partial even detrimental, if we do not deliberately develop and give expression to the transcendent, transformational dimension that is a constituent part of our human nature. The goal of Catholic education, and all good education, is to achieve this.

Dr Denis Robinson retired as Director of the Centre for Religious Education and Course Leader of the MA in Christian Leadership in Education in Marino Institute of Education in 2020. During his academic career, he taught modules on theology, the history of spirituality and contemporary spirituality, pastoral care, adult faith development, supervisory practice and theological integration. He has published in the areas of spirituality and theology. He continues to teach part-time in the fields of theology and spirituality and has recently (2025) edited a book on an exploration of the heart and practice of Catholic school ethos.

26. John Paul Sheridan

Forming Witnesses in a Fragmented World: Reimagining Catholic Teacher Identity through the Lens of the Global Compact on Education

It has almost become a cliché to suggest that the Catholic school is situated in an increasingly pluralistic, fragmented, and technocratic world. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. The Catholic school stands as a community of formation and as a countercultural witness to the world around it. At the centre of the entire endeavour is the teacher. They are not simply the deliverers of the academic content, but are (potentially) the spiritual, moral and cultural mediator, transmitting and exemplifying the Catholic faith tradition. Catholic teacher identity is no longer an inherited status but a call to become ever more fully human in Christ. Seen in this way, it emerges not as a crisis but as a hopeful frontier for Catholic education. This paper contributes to a rethinking of Catholic teacher formation – as the cultivation of a deeply integrated vocational identity, responsive to the signs of our times and animated by the Spirit of encounter, mercy, and truth. This paper considers the evolving nature of Catholic teacher identity in light of contemporary educational challenges and explores its formation through three current lenses: current scholarship in Catholic Teacher Identity; some of the recent magisterial documents, in particular the Global Compact on Education (GCE); and the recent research from G.R.A.C.E. The paper situates Catholic teacher identity within the broader anthropology of Christian formation. It argues that Catholic teachers are not merely religious operatives but "artisans of culture" and "companions on the journey." The vocation of the teacher is envisioned as both ecclesial and missiological: educators are sent not just to teach doctrine but to foster communities of belonging, truth, mercy, and justice. The prophetic dimension of Catholic teaching emerges as crucial here: teachers must learn to read the "signs of the times" in light of the Gospel, to recognize the hidden wounds in their students and society, and to respond with wisdom and compassion. The Catholic teacher today stands at the centre of a crossroad: amid a world in flux and an institutional and ecclesial transition. That teacher must embody both fidelity and innovation. The GCE offers a powerful vision for renewal—one that is relational, global, inclusive, and rooted in Gospel values.

Dr. John-Paul Sheridan is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns. Undergraduate degrees from NUI Maynooth (BA) and the Pontifical Gregorian University (STB). Post-graduate degrees from Boston College (MEd) and University of Dublin at Trinity College (PhD) and the King's Inn (Diploma in Education and Law). He joined the staff at St. Patrick's Pontifical University Maynooth in 2014 as Education Programmes Coordinator. As well as specialising in Religious Education and Catechesis, he also teaches courses in both Systematic Theology and Liturgy.

27. Daniel O'Connell & Amalee Meehan

The Global Compact on Education: An Act of Translation

This paper proposes the Global Compact on Education as a translation and application of the values and vision of Catholic education for partners outside the Christian tradition. Walter Brueggemann (1989) offers a helpful biblical image in this regard. In the Book of Isaiah, the Israelites, when under attack from the Assyrians, negotiate with them at the wall of their fortress. The Israelites speak two languages. They speak Hebrew, the language behind the wall, the language of their day to day lives and the language of their faith. But that language is redundant at the wall. It is meaningless to the Assyrians. To negotiate at the wall, the Israelites speak Aramaic - the language of international diplomacy and social policy. Using Aramaic they can meaningfully communicate with the Assyrians.

Employing this image, we propose to situate the Global Compact as a 'language at the wall' – a translation of the values and vision of Catholic education - in order to work collaboratively with others. However, we need to be careful, as things can sometimes get lost in translation. Drawing on the work of a secular writer, Jonathan Haidt (2025), we identify five important contributions of religious traditions to the flourishing of the human person: appreciation for the sacred; importance of embodiment, in a time of virtual reality; stillness, silence and focus; transcending the self and being slow to anger and quick to forgive. We argue that these five themes need to find a place in the seven commitments of the Compact in order to maximise its potential.

Daniel O'Connell is an Assistant Professor at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. His main research interests include Religious Education and Catholic primary schools; the public significance of Christian faith; the place of Catholic education in a pluralist society; developing a public spirituality for social justice.