**Text of keynote by Dr Stephen McKinney**

First thank you so much for the invitation to speak this morning. It is a genuine honour to be asked. I have taught religious education in a number of Catholic secondary schools in the city of Glasgow, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I then joined a Catholic Teacher Training College as a lecturer in Religious Education. This College had been founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame in Glasgow in 1895. Shortly after I arrived, the College merged with the University of Glasgow. Catholic Teacher education for Scotland is now housed in the School of Education in the University of Glasgow. I have been teaching at school, College and university level for well over thirty years. I have also been researching Catholic education and Catholic schools for most of that time. I have a great interest in the identity of Catholic schools, the inclusive nature of Catholic schools, the option for the poor and the history of Catholic schools. I have essentially committed my teaching and academic career to Catholic education and Catholic schools.

I have been in discussion with Martin and Frank for some time about the Marist schools. We have discussed at length the content and direction of this keynote. I have found the history and the identity of the schools very interesting and hope this keynote will support you in the dialogues that will be the feature of the next few days.

This morning I want to talk on the following four themes: Catholic identity and Faith formation, leadership, option for the poor and inclusion. I will be posing more questions than providing answers. I think that is important – to raise the questions. I cannot really answer the questions for you. I can only provide some indicators. Your community of schools must work through these questions and ideas. That begins today and will extend over a period of time.

Throughout this keynote, I want to refer to some episodes that feature Mary in the gospels. The gospel of Luke is where Mary is mentioned most often. She features heavily in the Infancy Narrative, notably in the annunciation, in the visitation, in the birth and the presentation in the Temple. But she also features in the ministry of Jesus. Finally, she is mentioned in Acts of the Apostles in 1:14 at the beginning of the early Church. So, let’s begin this morning with the Annunciation. This is a beautiful story of encounter.

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.  And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.  And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.  He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. Mary said the angel, “ How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.  And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.  For nothing will be impossible with God.”  Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.*

This is, of course, a very well-known passage and we associate it with the feast of the annunciation. We think of Advent and the preparation for Christmas and the birth of Jesus. This passage, however, tells us a lot about Mary. Gabriel appears to Mary in Nazareth. Previous to this we have been introduced to some very important people in Luke’s gospel. The angel appeared to Zechariah who was a priest at the temple – the most sacred space for Jews. The angel appears to Mary in non- sacred space. Mary is a young girl from a very modest background. The interesting part of the story is the response of Mary to the announcement by the angel. Mary is willing to accept this role. It is fascinating to note that Mary, has the last word in this episode, as she replies: I am the handmaid of the Lord…Let what you have said be done to me’ (verse 38). The response from the young and poor Jewish woman is exemplary and demonstrates her inner strength and her ‘trusting faith’. Let’s go a little deeper and revisit some of the words of the angel:

*The angel says…He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*

By listening to these words, Mary is the first to hear the gospel – the good news. The evangelist Luke understands her not just as a disciple, but as the **first** Christian disciple. Further, she is not just the first Christian disciple, she is the model of the ideal disciple. She heard the word of God and responded by accepting it and acting on it. She is a believer for whom God’s word is enough. Mary is doubly blessed as the mother of the Lord and blessed as the first believer. I wanted to start with this passage to set the context for the keynote and for the discussion of the way ahead for your schools. This is because Jean Claude Colin and the founding generation of Marists recognised Mary as the gospel figure who inspired their educational mission.

**Theme 1: Catholic identity and Faith formation**

Mary is the first disciple and the first to have faith. Catholic schools can be termed as ‘faith schools’ and there are a number of issues here. What does it mean to be a Catholic school? There are times when there is an uncertainty and hesitancy about calling a Catholic school a faith school. There can be even more hesitancy in talking about the faith formation of children and young people. Some people can be uncomfortable with the word formation. Formation, however, is not indoctrination it is **invitation**. We cannot force Christianity on children and young people. This is expressly forbidden by the Church. We can and should provide opportunities for them to encounter Jesus Christ. This happens through the culture and daily operation of the school and through personal example. Let’s look at what that means in practical terms. Catholic schools usually provide many signs and signals to the outside world but also to the school community itself. Sometimes the name of the Catholic school is a major signifier. Often a saints name is adopted or one of the titles for Mary. A Catholic school, like all schools will have a mission statement and will publish the aims of the school. Just as a point of interest – how often are these revised and who participates in the revision? This has been an issue for us in Scotland. In the contemporary world, the mission statement and aims are often highlighted on school webpages. The Catholic school may have a motto. I attended a Jesuit school, so our motto was *Ad majora natus sum* – I was born for greater things. The Catholic school is often physically characterised by crosses, crucifixes, iconography and statues. On deeper levels, there is usually a pattern of shared prayer and worship following the liturgical seasons. The major feasts are recognised and observed. There is a distinct form of religious education that will focus primarily, though not exclusively, on Christianity. There are often close links with local Catholic communities, through parents and parishes.

I mentioned personal example. It is common to consider the school leadership team, the religious education teachers, and the chaplains as the ones best suited to offer a personal example of a Christian life. This is not the case as we are all called upon to demonstrate a personal example. I think people feel uncomfortable with this idea of personal example. Yet as teachers and educators we are role models in so many ways already.

There is a connected point that we need to consider when discussing Catholic schools. The Catholic school is described in the Vatican documentation as a synthesis of educational and theological aims. There is an educational foundation and a theological foundation. The children and young people have to have a sound education to enable them to grow, develop, fulfil their potential and make a contribution to society. Equally, the school aims for support them in their faith journey by offering them opportunities to encounter Christ and develop as followers, or disciples. This means a very careful balance has to be struck between these two aims. If there is an over emphasis on the educational aims, then this compromises the theological aims. Similarly, if there is an over emphasis on theological aims then this compromises the educational aims. One strong criticism of some Catholic schools is that the school is driven by the educational aims – the desire to achieve in public examinations. To deliver a high-quality educational outcome that will please parents and the educational authorities in the government. Another strong criticism is that the Catholic school is too focussed on Catholic Christianity and the development of the Christian life and there is insufficient attention to the educational aims. This then disadvantages the children as they leave school to enter into the world and contribute to the world. This balance must be carefully maintained.

**Theme 2: Leadership**

Leadership – the leadership of Catholic schools is crucial to their success and the leadership must be strong (and courageous) in promoting and progressing the Catholic nature and culture of the school.

The membership of the religious orders and congregations has declined in number throughout the world. Many have withdrawn from Catholic schools. There has been much debate about the emerging role of lay people in Catholics schools, assuming greater responsibility. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) foresaw this in the later part of the twentieth century and took a positive approach to this new emerging challenge:

*Historical forces at work in the schools of today lead to the conclusion that, at least for the immediate future, continued existence of Catholic schools in many traditionally Catholic countries is going to depend largely on the laity, just as that existence has depended and does depend, with great fruit, on lay people - in so many of the young Churches.* ***This responsibility cannot be assumed with passive attitudes of fear and regret; it is a responsibility that offers a challenge to firm and effective action.*** *And this action should even now look to and plan for the future with the help of the Religious Institutes who see their possibilities diminishing in the days immediately ahead* (The *Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education*, 1982, section 45).

This is nowhere more urgent than in the development of leaders for Catholic schools. Professor Gerald Grace has argued that many of the lay leaders of the Catholic schools in England and Wales were themselves educated in Catholic schools that were run by religious orders and congregations. This being the case, they had experienced what is known as the charism of the school. They experienced the daily commitment to the children and young people and the faith life of the school by priests or brothers and sisters. This is now diminishing and there are some key questions are about how lay teachers can be trained to be leaders in Catholic schools and this includes distributed leadership.

There are a variety of different contemporary models of leadership that can be used in Catholic schools. Some of these are drawn, partially drawn, or discerned from the life and ministry of Jesus and are considered to be appropriate for Catholic schools. This includes servant leadership, transrelational leadership, leadership for adaptive change and transcendent leadership. The models are not mutually exclusive and I do need to issue a health warning. We need to take care when drawing from episodes in the life of Jesus. The gospels are not biographies of Jesus Christ. These are salvific books mostly focussed on a three-year ministry. The gospels and are possibly better described as proclamations of good news.

 Servant leadership is particularly attractive and popular as it presupposes a moral stance and a style of leadership that seeks to serve others and resists wielding power over other people. Servant leadership in Catholic schools is grounded in the Jesus who is presented in the gospels as servant. Jesus rejected any attempts to acquire power or have power invested on him. He repeatedly rejected Messianic power roles (Mark 8:11-12, 33). There are some compelling examples of Jesus instructing the disciples about serving in Mark’s gospel (Mark 10: 35-45) and of Jesus demonstrating this servant leadership in the washing of the disciples’ feet in John’s gospel (John 13:1-17). This does not mean that Jesus had no authority - he had authority and granted the authority to his disciples. The difference is that the authority in servant leader is not to be equated with control and authoritarianism.

The model of the emotionally intelligent leader is a model of leadership that has also been attracting increasing attention in recent research into school leadership. I think this is one that can be successfully applied to leaders in Catholic schools. An emotionally intelligent leader has: *Self-awareness; Self-control; Social awareness* and *Relationship understanding. Self-awareness* means that an individual can recognise and understand her/his emotions. A person who is self-aware has self-confidence and is realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. *Self-control* means that an individual can manage her/his emotions effectively and is more likely to avoid rushed emotional decisions. *Social awareness* entails being able to recognize and understand the emotions of others. *Relationship understanding* refers to the use and application of a person’s emotional understanding in dealing with others.

As the formation of the lay leaders of Catholic schools has become increasingly important there are questions about the preparation and formation of future leaders. The Catholic leader has multiple roles. This includes educational and curriculum leadership but also religious and pastoral leadership. There are different options for the formation of leaders. Some options include formal education with some form of certification or even degree in Catholic leadership. Other options include mentoring by other leaders from a different school. In Scotland We have Catholic headteacher Associations where support is provided. It is also becoming clear that more support and development is required for middle leaders and for curriculum leaders in Catholic schools.

**Theme 3: Option for the Poor**

I now want to look at the theme of option for the poor. Let’s begin with a look at the passage in Luke that focuses on Mary and Elisabeth – the visitation.

*During those days Mary set out and travelled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord*[*\**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/1)*should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed*[*\**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/1)*that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”  And Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my saviour. For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.*

Elisabeth recognises the importance of Mary and her role in salvation history. Note the words and the tone in the Magnificat. Mary has piety but the rich are proud self-sufficient – no need for God. If she is the first disciple, she now proclaims some of the major themes of gospel by anticipation. She anticipates the proclamation by Jesus in the synagogue in chapter 4 and the beatitudes.

*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written.*

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’.*

*And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them: ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’*

(Luke 4:16-21)

The gospel of Luke has a special emphasis on the poor and people on the periphery, the downtrodden the sinner, widows, Samaritans. And this can be traced back to the holiness code in the Old Testament. The point I wish to make is that the option for the poor is deeply rooted in the Old and New Testament.

Many contemporary Catholic schools and school systems were founded in the 18th to early 20th centuries to educate the poor. The inclusion and education of the poor has been a great strength of many Catholic schools. The levels of poverty around the world are quite simply shocking and have been exacerbated by the aftereffects of Covid-19 and warfare (and not just Ukraine). We are in unprecedented times. With some of my colleagues we have been researching the effects of covid on Catholic schools in Scotland and England and Wales. I am sure some of this some of this will resonate with you. Children and young people are dependents, and their poverty is related to the poverty of the household. Covid served to highlight digital poverty or digital exclusion. Food poverty and fuel poverty have become very common in the last few years. Children and young people are arriving in school hungry. Schools are providing breakfast and there is a higher uptake on free school meals. And there are more hidden forms of poverty – the poverty experienced by households with disabled children, or the poverty experienced by young carers. Young carers are those children and young people who care for a sick or disabled member of the household – usually an adult. These are households that have limited income. Material poverty has increased and is affecting the lives of many children and young people. In the UK the poverty figures for children and young people lie between 25% and 30%. This is scandalous in 2023.

In the past we talked about mission for the poor or special concern for the poor. Now we talk about preferential option for poor or option for the poor. While much of the concern is **rightly** about material poverty, there are other forms of poverty experienced by children and young people. If we look back to the seminal Vatican document on Christian Education Gravissimum Educationis (1965) we read the template for the mission of the Catholic Church in Catholic schools: Pope Paul VI, 1965). Section 9 is focussed on the special care for the poor:

*This Sacred Council of the Church earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfill their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith.*

The special care of the Catholic school is for the poor who are identified as experiencing material poverty, emotional poverty, and spiritual poverty. This makes the option for the poor more challenging and more urgent.

**Theme 4: Inclusion**

My final passage is from Matthew’s gospel:

In the infancy narratives in Matthew’s gospel the Holy Family flee to Egypt to escape the massacre of the innocents instigated by Herod (Matthew: 2: 13-23).

*When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.  He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Matthew 2: 13-15*

The flight to Egypt is clearly linked to some key figures and events in the Old Testament. The story can be perceived to link the flight to Egypt with the story of the patriarch Joseph in Egypt. It can be linked to the Jewish people in Babylon during the Exile. The story also connects the birth of Jesus to the birth of Moses and the story of Moses subsequently being saved from the Pharaoh’s edict to slaughter the first-born males of the Israelites. One contemporary interpretation explains that the story indicates that Jesus and his family are refugees. The family is forced to flee from their own land to escape persecution and danger. The story is often used to refer to Jesus as a refugee. It is used to demonstrate that he has shared in the historical experience of the Jews as displaced people in Egypt at the time of Moses. Jesus has shared this experience of being displaced and can be understood to be in solidarity with the millions of people who are displaced throughout the world today. However, Mary and Joseph also experienced this. She shared the experience of being a forcibly displaced person to protect her child and she too is in solidarity with those who have been displaced.

In many respects inclusion is a great strength of Catholic schools throughout the world. Inclusion can take many forms. It can refer to non-practicing Catholics, non-Catholics, disabled children, displaced people and the poor and vulnerable. This list is not exhaustive. There is one thing they all have in common. We believe that they are all created in the image and likeness of God – *Imago Dei.* If we draw on the first creation story in Genesis, we also believe that humans are created as a good part of a good creation. The second creation story reminds us that we are fallen and prone to sin. We have free will to choose. But let’s stick with these ideas of made in the image and likeness of God and being a good part of a good creation. We don’t often reflect on this and yet it is a very positive and hopeful view on life. Yes, we have serious challenges with ecology at the moment. Yes, we have terrible sex abuse scandals. But we are made for goodness and this we can share with all children and young people.

I want to conclude by talking about the inclusion of migrants or displaced people. We now have increasing numbers of displaced children in our Catholic schools in Scotland from different parts of the world. Many of them belong to families that were forcibly displaced, fleeing war or starvation. Some are Catholic and wish to pursue a Catholic education. Others are not but see a great benefit in Catholic schools. This can create a need for extra support in terms of language and cultural support. Some of the children may have been traumatised by their experiences. This cultural support is also needed for the children and young people who are already in the school. This is to help them understand the newly arrived children.

Several years ago, we (a team) were asked to provide some support for a Catholic school in an industrial part of Scotland. The Catholic school had received a large influx of Polish children. The families had moved to Scotland for work. The head teacher and the leaders were very concerned to include the Polish children in the life of the school. They asked us for support to raise awareness and develop a coherent plan. They wanted a whole school plan so that the children could be integrated not assimilated. Our advice was to ensure the children retained their own language and continued cultural practices where possible. The strategies included bi-lingual signage in English and Polish. The staff and pupils were taught some basic Polish words. They were introduced to some basic facts about Polish culture. The Polish children were Catholic, so feast days associated with Poland were celebrated. Home school partnerships were strengthened. The result was that the Catholic school was transformed in many ways.

Thank you for listening and I hope I have provided much to think about. I wish you success in your discussions and deliberations. I leave you with that striking sentence from *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982):

***This responsibility cannot be assumed with passive attitudes of fear and regret; it is a responsibility that offers a challenge to firm and effective action.***