G. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A crucial step in any successful identity management process is making a correct analysis and having an adequate understanding of the unfolding reality at school. The ECSIP process aims to present this analysis and understanding as well as provide a new vocabulary and conceptualisations that are useful to think and talk effectively about Catholic school identity. Below we offer the summary and conclusion of the results from St Columba's School, Wilston in the form of qualities and strengths on the one hand and challenges and critical questions on the other. Lastly, we present a number of recommendations from the standpoint of the Catholic University of Leuven’s *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project*.

1. Qualities and strengths

This first section presents the school's most significant qualities and strengths with regard to its Catholic identity based on the outcomes of the ECSIP 2015 research. All the obtained research results from the different questionnaires are included. Results from the 234 respondents at St Columba's School, Wilston (41.1% of the total population; 80.8% of the population with the parents excluded) illustrate that the building blocks for maintaining and strengthening its Catholic identity are well in place. The school possesses many qualities and strengths, both in its current practice and its future prospects. These are thematically ordered according to the perception of relevance in connection with the ECSIP thrust.

1.1 Support for Post-Critical Belief

The *PCB Scale* results demonstrate that the majority of the respondents at St Columba's prefer *Post-Critical Belief* (Figures B.2-B.6). The term *Post-Critical Belief* refers to a well-considered faith in God despite critical reasons not to believe. It attempts a fresh, outside-of-the-box and creative way of looking at and interpreting the present context. Based on theological arguments as well as on empirical findings, a symbolic style of faith proves to be the most fruitful for developing a Catholic school identity in a pluralising society, both for today and tomorrow. The fact that *Post-Critical Belief* is the most adopted belief style is therefore a very significant building block for the school's Catholic identity. Moreover, it will offer the best support for *Recontextualisation* efforts and *Dialogical* endeavours.

1.2 Support for the Dialogue School

The results of the *Victoria Scale*, which considers a school's openness for diversity in relation to its Catholic identity, show that for both adults and students the most obvious school identity option is the *Dialogue School* type (Figures D.2-D.7). This is a very promising result because this option combines a maximal openness for cultural, social and religious diversity with an explicit choice for the Catholic tradition as a preferred partner in the conversation. It is important to point out that *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015* 43
Dialogue not only implies the conversation with religious diversity in society, but also with the religious tradition in which the school is situated. Furthermore, within the context of the Dialogue School attention is focused on the specific manner in which the Dialogue inspires and shapes the school community in words and actions. St Columba's makes an explicit choice for the Dialogue School model, which will help in sustaining its Catholic identity in a rapidly changing world.

1.3 Recontextualising the Catholic faith

It is clear from the results of the Melbourne Scale that the adults both perceive and prefer the option of Recontextualisation to bridge the widening gap between Christianity and our culture today. In Figures C.2-C.3, we see a high score for Recontextualisation on the factual level, and even increasing support on the normative level, above all the other options. A Recontextualising approach means that the Catholic faith is reinterpreted and understood in the midst of a quickly changing and pluralising world. At St Columba's, the intention to Recontextualise is backed up by a relatively high level of Confessionality at school, although the adults perceive it more than the students do (Figures C.2-C.5). Given the pluralising and secularising context, the adults' preference for Recontextualisation is important, as it will help uphold the school's Catholic identity in the long run.

1.4 Affiliation with the Catholic faith

St Columba's demonstrates that it is a Catholic school where the majority of survey respondents share a religious affiliation with the Catholic faith (Figure E.2). This observation is a fundamental strength in upholding and fostering the school's Catholic identity. Over one third of the adults (35.8%) and about one fifth of the children (20.5%) consider themselves to have strong faith in Christ and essentially all of the remainder have average faith in Christ (Figure E.3). Moreover, 72.2% of the adults and 55.4% of the students critically support the Catholic faith (Figure E.4). These data reflect the respondents' self-description about their personal prayer life where 41.0% of the students and 43.0% of the adults are active in prayer, while 50.6% of the children and 45.7% of the adults also pray, albeit irregularly (Figure E.5).

1.5 Support for Catholic school identity

St Columba's Catholic identity is supported by most of the adult and student respondents. 37.7% of the adults and 18.1% of the children offer strong support, while the remaining respondents tend to give more passive support (Figure F.1). In connection with this, the majority of the respondents concur and desire that their school continues to be a very good place to grow closer to God (Figures F.2-F.3). When it comes to specific Catholic features, the student respondents desire significant increases of most aspects of the faith, while the adults also desire some increases (Figure F.4). These results show that St Columba's is not a Catholic school 'in name only,' but is experienced by many in the community as a religious and spiritual place.

1.6 Resistance to Secularising tendencies

A strong majority of the adult and student respondents reject External Critique (Figures B.2-B.6). Most of the adults and students also resist Institutional Secularisation (Figures C.2-C.7). This concurs Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015 44
with the earlier mentioned strong affiliation of the majority of the respondents with the Christian faith and the explicit support of a large number of students and school staff for a school with a Catholic identity. Also the results of the *Victoria Scale* show that significant groups among the adult and student respondents resist a *Colourful and Colourless School* on the ideal level (Figures D.2-D.5).

### 1.7 Openness to diversity

As a majority of respondents come from Australia, there is not much diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds currently present at St Columba's (Figure E.1). However, there is some amount of diversity in light of religious affiliation (Figure E.2). The Catholics compose the majority of the adults, but among the students and parents, a small fraction follow another religion. Among all three respondent groups, a tiny percentage of people are non-religious. From Figure F.4, both the students and adults would like to see an increase in the school's openness to different cultures and religions. This information shows that the classrooms of St Columba's could be fertile ground for continuing with the *Dialogue School* model, in order to uphold and foster the school's Catholic identity in a plural world.

### 2. Potential challenges and critical questions

The outcome of the surveys in St Columba's School shows that overall the people involved support their school's Catholic identity. However, a close look at the results also points out some potential challenges and critical questions in the area of Catholic school identity.

#### 2.1 High Literal Belief among the students

Even though the dominant cognitive belief style among the students is *Post-Critical Belief*, their score on *Literal Belief* is also relatively high (Figures B.4-B.5). 56.4% of the students tend to agree with *Literal Belief* statements – of this number, 14.1% strongly agree. While this is a general tendency among primary school students, it should be considered with caution. The potential danger of a high *Literal Belief* score is that the students reject faith altogether when they grow older, as they are living in a changing and pluralising cultural context. Since the *Literal Believing* stance might no longer ring true at a certain age, students become prone to adopt a non-believing stance, such as *Relativism* or *External Critique*. As Figure B.7 illustrates, students tend to swap believing for non-believing stances at later stages in life. Moreover, we see that the level of *Literal Belief* is significantly lower among the adult respondents (Figure B.2 versus B.4). Could it be that the adults are teaching something they do not believe themselves? In fact, contrary to what many adults presume, children are able to interpret the Catholic faith in a symbolic, hermeneutical way. As it is much more difficult to guide someone from a *Relativistic* stance towards *Post-Critical Belief* than from a *Literal* to a symbolically mediated belief, it is very important to guide the students towards *Post-Critical Belief* already from a young age onwards.

#### 2.2 High support for Christian Values Education

While *Recontextualisation* is the adults' favoured way of relating the Catholic faith to contemporary culture, *Christian Values Education* heavily supports and influences how this *Recontextualisation* takes place (Figures C.2-C.7). It is also the strategy most desired by students on the normative level. By directly connecting universal values with the Catholic faith, *Christian Values Education* purports to connect the Catholic identity of the school with universal values.
like love, friendship, compassion, care, solidarity and respect. The hope is that the particularities of the Catholic faith will grow in appeal when related to today's shared values and sensitivities. What instead results is a reduction of the Catholic faith and other worldviews to the 'least common denominator'. In a sense, Catholicism itself becomes Secularised. The distinctiveness that Catholicism and all different beliefs bring to the table is diminished to what is easily digestible for everyone. Values are a vital part of both education and the faith tradition itself, but an overreliance on values can blind us to the particularity and specificity of Catholicism and other beliefs.

Additionally, while beginning from a significant point of interest initially engages the students, their attention will be lost if the end result always winds up at the well-worn path to a Christian answer. With the presumption that there is a Christian answer to every question, the Christian answer often becomes trite and, as a mono-correlation strategy becomes predictable, students will soon zone out. In addition, such a strategy tends to diminish the complexity of human experience and the multidimensionality of the Catholic faith. (For more about the risks of Christian Values Education, see Figure C.8.)

2.3 Decreasing opposition to the Colourful School and Colourless School

Even with clear support for St Columba's Catholic identity and a commitment to solidarity in the midst of diversity (Dialogue School), we see that the participants, particularly the children, have lessening resistance toward schools that do not uphold Christian identity (Figures D.2-D.7). A significant minority of students less and less see the value or significance of the Catholic faith at the institutional level, as being expressed in the public square. 44.6% (just over 2 in 5 students) favour trends of the Colourful School, which has maximal solidarity and minimal Christian identity. Nearly one quarter of the students are unsure. Even a little over 30% of the students agree with aspects of the Colourless School type. The Colourful School and Colourless School are both secular school types that will increasingly rival the current preference for the Dialogue School, which will eventually pose a problem for the school's Catholic identity.

There is a need to be cautious about activities that gradually water down the inherent solidarity with others in the Christian tradition. At the same time, it is important that the Dialogue being practised is a mutually-enriching conversation: it should be a Recontextualising Dialogue instead of a one-way proclamation of religious faith that risks obliterating the others' point of view. The shift between the Dialogue School and the Colourful School is a decisive one. In the latter school model, the Catholic faith is no longer the privileged conversational partner and Secularisation will emerge. When the way of a Colourful School is chosen, the shift to a Colourless School is often not far behind. Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015 46

2.4 Implementing changes to Catholic identity markers

Given the above issues, it will be a challenge to improve the school's Catholic identity markers in newly expressed and even unconventional ways both mindful of the Christian tradition and reflective of the Post-Critical Belief, Recontextualisation and Dialogue School insights discussed in this report. It is already a good point that most of the adults' and some of the students' preference is nearly in the same direction. It will be important to Dialogue about concrete ways in which to carry out these improvements – the more the students are able to participate in these discussions, and the more their ideas are taken on board, the better. There is also a challenge in how to clearly demonstrate the intrinsic link between solidarity and justice actions on the one hand and the school's Catholic identity on the other. This observation is very
important to note given the increasing openness of the students to the Colourful School and Colourless School instead of the Dialogue School.

2.5 Tendencies towards Reconfessionalisation and Monologue School

Another challenge faced by St Columba's is the desire by many adults (43.8%) and students (46.1%) to apply a strategy of Reconfessionalisation to the school. This finding is accompanied by a subgroup of adults (18.1% + 19.0% hesitation) and students (30.8% + 30.8% hesitation) desiring a Monologue School. Contrary to these trends, there are other subgroups who resist any Reconfessionalisation (among adults: 18.2% and among students: 30.8%) as well as the Monologue School model (among adults: 63.0% and among students: 38.5%). While most adults actively resist the Monologue School, many of the students still perceive St Columba's as existing in a Catholic bubble. In fact, they mostly see the adults as currently practising Reconfessionalisation (63.1% agree).

The Monologue School model tends to ignore the plurality of religious views and practices outside and inside the school, or considers such views a threat, rather than a source of richness. According to ECSIP, care should be taken to keep the conversations at school from becoming Reconfessionalising in a Monological way. Though some level of Reconfessionalisation is necessary for Recontextualisation to occur, these efforts must be carried out in Dialogue with the growing diversity present in and around the school. Reconfessionalisation and Recontextualisation can be framed as processes that work together, always moving forward, relating faith symbolically to its surroundings and yet affirming its uniqueness. A Recontextualised communication of the Catholic faith may reassure the students that the adults are not stuck in an 'old-fashioned', uncompromising Catholic Confessionality, but instead understand the students’ current cultural situation and can translate the faith tradition in a way that is enriching and relevant for their lives today. Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015 47
3. Recommendations by KU Leuven

After having examined and analysed the data from St Columba's School, the ECSIP team at KU Leuven's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies provides the following recommendations in order of perceived priority. Recommendations are indeed just that – recommendations – and it will be up to each school to engage with and take ownership of their ECSIP report in a practical, inclusive and engaging manner.

3.1 Transition from Literal to Post-Critical Belief

Currently the students have high levels of both Literal Belief and Post-Critical Belief. As the adults continue to develop their own relationship with God through translating religious symbols and stories for the contemporary context, they should also sensitively guide the students’ Literal Belief towards a more Post-Critical Believing stance. Within Post-Critical Belief, doubt is not seen as an inadequacy on the part of the believer, but a needed (though difficult) component of experiencing the mystery of faith. Rather than glossing over their own personal difficulties, the teachers could demonstrate to their students a way of believing that is both aware of the multiplicity of belief options (Relativism) and the failures of religion (External Critique), but ultimately sees faith as a journey buoyed and sustained by fresh interpretations each new day. Early on, the adults might allow the children to participate in their own faith experiences in a way that encompasses both the highs and lows, instead of relaying a Literal Believing attitude, which would later need to be untaught.

3.2 Practical suggestions for fostering Post-Critical Belief

When considering how to influence students in making the move to a more Post-Critical Belief stance, a good place to start from is to see how the Bible is used at school. Where are the Bibles located? What versions are used and how close is the text to the original text? Are both the Old and New Testaments included? Is the Bible taught as a complex book, or are the 'easy', moral stories primarily selected for teaching? If applicable, a group of the staff could conduct a review of the children's Bibles at school, which are often highly literal and selective in their portrayal of the Biblical stories. In choosing Biblical passages for use in liturgies, consider texts of a more difficult, thought-provoking variety. This allows the students to read the Bible in its entire dimension, as a text that requires interpretation and an understanding of the original context. Involve the children in the selection of texts for liturgies.

In the classroom, the teachers might lead the students in a close reading of the school’s version of the Lord's Prayer. This could be compared with the version in the gospel of Luke, where the children spot the differences. A discussion could develop about why such differences might have emerged in the texts. In rereading the prayers, the teachers can encourage the students to develop their own hermeneutical abilities by interpreting the text and putting it in their own words. The depth of the Catholic tradition could also be involved in this exercise, as the students could be exposed to older versions of the prayer, alongside contemporary versions. Through this diversity of texts, as well as Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015 48
the students' own interpretative challenge, not only differences, but similarities in the different versions of the prayer are revealed.

3.3 Prioritisation of Recontextualisation over Christian Values Education

As has been stressed above, there is a need to critically evaluate the adults' strong reliance on Christian Values Education, particularly in relation to the low perception of Recontextualisation by the students in relation to the adults' efforts. We recommend that the staff carefully consider their Recontextualising efforts, in light of what they know about Christian Values Education. It could be that the staff and teachers are connecting relevant and contemporary examples to the Catholic faith, but in too direct and linear of a manner. Rather than correlating the faith tradition to culture in a one-to-one way, multiple inroads should be made; instead of mono-correlative, a multi-correlative approach should be pursued. Paths between culture and faith can run both inside and outside the Christian story. For example, when Lent approaches, this provides a good opportunity for exploring the Christian practice of fasting. But rather than only looking at fasting from the Catholic perspective, other religious traditions should also be considered, such as the Muslims' Ramadan, as well as Buddhist practices and Jewish fast days. Similarities can be emphasised as much as differences. It is important that this exercise remains comparative and not competitive. By way of Isaiah 58, social justice issues can also be brought into the discussion. Beyond the major world religions, hunger strikes can also be looked at as efforts to achieve justice. Due to the role the teacher plays, the Catholic faith remains the preferential perspective, but a multi-correlative approach will allow room for other life and faith experiences to be genuinely expressed and critically explored in the classroom.

3.4 Dialogue School: a time to speak and a time to listen

We notice only a certain level of cultural and religious diversity at school, which means St Columba’s will need to be creative in their pursuit of maintaining the Dialogue School model. As noted above, the adults and students are already open to more diversity at their school. There are still ways to explore plurality both within the Catholic tradition and outside of it. The presence of a majority of Catholics needs to be taken as an opportunity to affirm a Dialogical and Recontextualising Catholic school identity within which the diversity of the Catholic traditions might be explored. Likewise, the presence of a few people from different cultural and religious groups can serve as an opportunity to have more Dialogue at school – it is important that the non-Catholics are invited to share from their own lives and faith experience, so that the Dialogue might be Recontextualising rather than only proclamatory (Kerygmatic Dialogue). For true Dialogue, there must be a time to speak and a time to listen. For example, the school community might consider promoting Dialogue by studying the Catholic stance in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and then by inviting visitors from other faiths to speak about their religion. The plurality within the wider Australian context can also be explored by organising visits to the houses of worship of other faiths, such as a temple, synagogue or mosque. Beyond Australia, St Columba's might promote exchanges in various ways with students from different schools. This could be done through digital correspondence or a parcel exchange. Likewise, activities in the various school subjects can encourage awareness and respect for a Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015 49
plurality of views. These activities can enhance the *Dialogical* character of upholding the school’s Catholic identity.

### 3.5 Reinterpreting the expressions of the faith

Finding fresh expressions for the enculturation of Catholic sacraments and rituals, Bible interpretation, dogmatic pronouncements, ethically-based commitments of the Catholic faith and even religious symbols and iconography will be an important task for the future of the school. Are the religious symbols and icons around the school clearly from a particular moment in time and from a particular cultural identity, such as the school’s founding? As new Catholic identity markers are designed for the school, it is important that these continue to visually reflect both the faith and the postmodern context we now live in – and it is crucial that the students are involved in these new elements. How might both content and form be *Recontextualised* today? Perhaps instead of a tile mosaic, a graffiti-style mural might be painted at school. Instead of classical portrayals of the saints in the prayer garden, a more abstract or minimalistic approach could be refreshing. Rather than a traditional style, a crucifix could be crafted in an Aboriginal artwork style, reflecting the location's people and history. At the celebration of saints' days, art projects for the students could be a good opportunity for the students' *Post-Critical Belief* to flourish. For example, the students might draw or paint St Columba at work in present-day Wilston, rather than shading within the lines of a colouring page. This gives the students themselves a chance to practice *Recontextualisation*.

### 3.6 The importance of staff formation

As the school strives towards *Recontextualisation* and a *Dialogue School* model, the ECSIP research considers it very important that it continues to form its leadership and teaching staff in matters of religion and Catholic identity. Ongoing training and formation for school leaders and teachers on a cognitive, personal, and spiritual level should enable them to relate to the Catholic faith in a *Post-Critical* and *Recontextualised* way. It will give them the skills to critically evaluate their attitudes and practices regarding e.g. their use of the Bible, their approach to Church history, their view on revelation and redemption, and their relation to other religions and philosophies of life. Furthermore, it will give them a language with which to reflect upon and speak about the religious identity of their school among one another and with the students.

### 3.7 Implementation: creating a Catholic school identity team

An identity team could be established at school that can facilitate the review St Columba’s ECSIP report. Together they could envision responses appropriate for the school's context. It can be a helpful exercise to start with the school's physical space by doing a school walkthrough, where the Catholic identity markers within school are seen with fresh eyes. What Catholic identity markers might appear trapped in the past? What aspects in the school’s décor, posters, bulletin boards or student projects appear *Reconfessionalising*? Where is *Values Education* at work? The identity team's analysis of the school space, and later analysis of the school’s practices and policies, would periodically need to be evaluated, corrected and adjusted. Through this, the team could provide leadership around the school’s Catholic identity. Several priorities could be identified with plans in *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project 2015*.
place for follow up. Having a few individuals from different teaching groups or within the school leadership charged with this responsibility will also promote collaboration across the school. In conclusion, the ECSIP survey research has identified both strengths and opportunities for the Catholic school identity of St Columba's in Wilston. These can be considered a source of inspiration and a strong support basis for devising and implementing effective responses to the challenges that were also identified by the research. With these qualities and strengths, challenges and critical questions, and suggested recommendations, we would like to encourage and support St Columba's School in its continuing effort to renew and enhance its Catholic identity in its unique and continuously changing context. This includes a hermeneutical and symbolic manner of engaging with religious beliefs and a school identity model that recontextualises Catholic identity in a manner that is faithful to the original Christian inspiration and Catholic faith tradition, while opting for solidarity and dialogue with the philosophical and religious diversity at school. From a theological point of view, we maintain that this multi-correlational didactical approach does most justice to the dynamics of revelation and the Christian faith tradition itself.