Armidale
Catholic Schools

Appendix 2

Catholic School Advisory Council
Process of Discernment, Nomination and Election

Rationale

Discernment is a time honoured practice in the Catholic tradition. In essence, discernment is a decision-making process that honours the place of God's will in our lives. It is an interior search that seeks to align our own will with the will of God in order to learn what God is calling us to. Every choice we make, no matter how small is an opportunity to align ourselves with God's will.

Discernment is also a part of the formal process for filling School Advisory Council (SAC) seats whereby those with knowledge of the work of the SAC and its long term goals select new members based on the school's needs.

The process of discernment shall be instituted as the first step when choosing SAC members.

Members of School Advisory Councils are chosen to meet the expertise needs of the SAC, not as representatives of any body.

The SAC listens to the wisdom of their community and their own members in order to know how best to serve.

Process

- **Nomination**

All nominations will be subject to a prayerful discernment process that will involve the SAC and those considering nomination to the SAC.The process will acknowledge potential, perceived or real conflicts of interest. This in itself is not an impediment. The process will have regard for confidentiality and be respectful towards all nominees.

Any vacancies for both renewal will involve a call for nominations from within the school community. This may include a direct invitation to certain school community members to consider nominating for the SAC.

Self nomination - this should be permitted as it could open up the process to a broader pool of potential members.

Nomination by another school community member. Ask the potential nominee if they are open to this service. This is not an award but a request for service - they should be asked for their permission first before a nomination goes forward.

Intending SAC nominees will complete a nomination form.

● Considerations

What are some qualities or capabilities we seek now in new membership?

What gifts do our prospective members offer at this stage?

The SAC should reflect the cultural diversity of the school served.

The group as a whole also needs to take account of its own limitations, weaknesses, and lack of awareness.

Discernment is a process associated with the virtue of prudence, by which we try to decide what God wills us to do in particular circumstances.

● Before Nomination Time

If nominations are called two weeks before a November AGM, an information session on the role of the SAC, and what is not the role of the SAC and of the discernment process should be held during Term 3.

In order to make good discernment, we need to have a clear and shared understanding of the mission of the group. What is our shared purpose?

Personal prayer and reflection will assist us in becoming more self-aware as we enter the discernment process. Am I acting in my interest or am I seeking the greater good?

Potential nominees should consider if this is right for them and if it is right for them now.

Pointers that can help you discern God's will:

- Talk to someone you respect.

God often speaks to us through the wisdom of others. Seek out the wisdom of at least one and perhaps a few people who you feel have the gift of wisdom and ask for their advice.

- Find some solitude.

It is good to talk to other people when making important decisions, but at some point, it is crucial to make some time to be alone with your thoughts and with God. Invite God into your decision making process.

- Start with what you know.

Lay out all of the facts in front of yourself so that you can deal with the known before you delve into the unknown.

- Tell God what it is you desire and what you fear.

Be honest and tell God what your deepest desires and fears are in this situation. Before you can say the words "Thy will be done", be sure you are truly in touch with your own will.

- Let God speak to you.

Most of us don't actually hear a voice when God speaks to us. However, pay attention closely to the ways that God is speaking to you. What kinds of thoughts, feelings, (especially love, joy and peace, or a lack thereof), and memories that God might be stirring within you to help you make your decision?

- Know God has a plan for you.

Remind yourself that you are not on your own and that you don't have to yell and scream to get God's attention to help you in this matter. On the contrary, remind yourself that God has a plan for you and that His plan is driven purely by love.

- Pray to do God's will.

As difficult as it may be, pray the words "Thy will be done", asking God to give you the strength you need to continue to discern His will and to follow it.

- Wait.

If circumstances allow, wait before making your decision. Continue to pay attention to your feelings to see which direction you are being drawn to.

- Prayerfully commit.

At some point, you need to act. Knowing that you have sought God's will, set forth to do the loving thing.

Some of our choices in life require deep thought, prayer and consideration, lest we find ourselves facing the consequences of a poor decision.
That's where discernment comes in.

Election of new members

Calls for final nomination will be publicised to the school community two (2) weeks prior to the Annual General Meeting in November according to Section 9.0 of this Constitution. Nomination forms will accompany this call for nomination.

Following the process of discernment, any candidate seeking election as a school community member shall be nominated by a member of the school community or by self-nomination.

During the time of preparation for the AGM, the School Advisory Council members should attempt to come to true indifference and to place her/himself in the presence of God.

Election of members to replace retiring members shall be held at the Annual General Meeting. The members of the SAC shall elect the new member(s). If there are a greater number of candidates than required, an election will be held by secret ballot, decided by a simple majority. The Returning Officer should be one of the two ex-officio members of the SAC, the Parish Priest or the Principal, and shall conduct the election and declare the result.

Only members of the SAC who are present at a meeting may vote in any election.

After the election.

What if an individual discerns differently from the rest? Does his/her contrary discernment invalidate the process? The process is not about an unanimity of opinions but a shared felt sense that this is God's Word to the community.

Appointment Process

Following the Annual General Meeting, appointment for other than ex-officio positions on the SAC will be by an official Letter of Appointment issued by the Parish Priest and the School Principal.

Commissioning of SAC members will be at the Start of the School Year Mass (or other as locally decided).

Letter of Invitation for potential School Advisory Council member Sample only

Date

Dear

The (insert name of school) Catholic School Advisory Council is in the process of discernment for new members. Your name has been put forward as a potential School Advisory Council member. Whilst being on the Advisory Council is not an onerous task, it is a service that calls for members who are comfortable with Catholic Principles and Values and the Mission of Catholic education.

We would like you to attend an information and discernment evening so you are able to ask any questions about the role of the School Advisory Council to help you decide if this is a way you would consider serving our school community.

The (insert name of school) School Advisory Council is currently made up of (insert name of Parish Priest), (insert name of Principal), one staff member and (insert number) of parents from our school.

We meet once a term and our role is to advise the Principal and Parish Priest on aspects of school life. School Advisory Council members are called to a particular service in Catholic education which is both a privilege and an opportunity to serve the children, the young people and their families who seek a Catholic education.

We are committed to collaborative and respectful “shared wisdom” model of decision making before giving our advice and recommendations to the Principal and Parish Priest. The students and families of our school community are at the centre of the work we do while we recognise that we are also a part of the wider parish community.

Please take time to consider this valuable service and contact (insert Principal’s name) or myself if you can join us on the evening of (insert date, time and location) where we can answer any questions that you may have to help you discern if this role may interest you.

Yours sincerely,

(insert name) (insert name)

Chairperson Principal