

# Network for Researchers in Catholic Education 2023 Annual Conference

## *Fluidly Faithful? Catholic Education and the Institutional Church*

*The conference invited participants to ponder the relationship between Catholic education and the wider Catholic Church. Keynotes included Professor John Sullivan, Professor Roisin Coll, Dr Quentin Wodon, Dr Aiveen Mullally, and Associate Professor Patricia Kieran. We were honoured to also have a diverse group of distinguished speakers including Dr Jill Gowdie, Professor Stephen McKinney, Professor David Torevell, Dr Catherine Stapleton, Dr Maurice Harmon, Dr Daniel O'Connell, Dr Mary Masterson, Dr Timothy Murphy, Reverend Professor Anne Lodge, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin Michael Jackson, and many more. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the conference. We are thrilled with its success. A special thanks to Dr Sean Whittle who helped organise the event. If you would like to know more about the conference, please use the QR code on this page to access the conference padlet page.*



*Excerpt from 'Latest trends in innovative and vital Catholic Educational Research' by Assoc Prof Patricia Kieran*

*At the end of October, a lively gathering of teachers, academics and researchers came together for the annual international conference of the Network for Researchers in Catholic Education (NfRCE). This two-day event took place on October 19th and 20th in Limerick city in Mary Immaculate College. The event was hosted jointly by the Catholic Association of Teachers Schools and Colleges (CATSC), NfRCE and the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies. The conference adopted as its theme 'Fluidly Faithful? Catholic Education and the Institutional Church' and it hosted delegates from Canada, Australia, USA, Europe, UK and Ireland. Attendees were given the opportunity to participate in four keynote sessions with speakers from England, Scotland, Ireland and one keynote based in Africa. In addition to two expert panels featuring leading thinkers on Catholic education, there were forty-four papers delivered by academics from across the globe. Each session focused on different aspects of the complex and dynamic relationship between Catholic education and the Institutional Church.*

*An undoubted highlight of the conference involved the presentation of the inaugural NfRCE Lifetime Catholic Research Achievement Award to Professor John Sullivan for his outstanding and distinguished international publication and research output on Catholic education.*

*The atmosphere is, as always at NfRCE events, warm, collegiate, good-humoured and very welcoming. So, if the readers appetite is whetted why not consider coming to the next NfRCE conference which will be held in St Andrew's College in Glasgow in 2024?*

*Access the  
conference  
padlet page  
here*







Conference Photos  
October 2023





Featured Papers from  
the Conference

**Professor Quentin Wodon**, from UNESCO and formerly lead economist and lead poverty specialist with the World Bank, keynoted on Catholic Leadership in schools in Africa. Wodon is a founding member of the volunteer-led Global Catholic Education (GCE) Project. He manages this project which publishes statistics and research through its annual report on Global Catholic Education. His fascinating keynote outlined that while most research on Catholic education comes from the Northern hemisphere, paradoxically the vast majority of the world's Catholics live in the Global South. The 2022 GCE Report states that since 1980, the number of Catholic schools in Europe declined by fifteen per cent yet it grew dramatically in other parts of the world and doubled in Asia and trebled in Africa during this time. The report notes that 'Globally, the number of preschools, primary schools, and secondary schools managed by the Church increased by 54 percent from 1980 to 2019, from 143,574 to 221,144. The increase was largest for preschools (89 percent), followed by secondary schools (67 percent) and primary schools (31 percent)' (GCE Report 2022, 1). In his keynote Wodon highlighted the need to focus on improving the quality of education in Catholic schools so that children may thrive. He outlined that in sub-Saharan Africa, nine out of ten children aged ten years old are learning poor. In other words, they are unable to read and understand an age-appropriate text. He emphasised greater solidarity and partnership in Catholic education and in research between the global South and the North.

Numerous excellent papers were delivered by experienced researchers in Catholic education. Dr Louise Mc Gowan from St Claudine's School in London spoke about what it means to be a school leader in a Catholic School while Dr Mary Mihovilović from St Mary's University, London presented on the English Catholic School System and the positioning for a Catholic Multi Academy Trust (CMAT) led system. Dr Catherine Stapleton (MIC) and Dr James Nelson (QUB) presented a timely paper on Employment Equality and Non-Religious Teachers in Religious Schools. This theme was also revisited by Dr Eamonn Elliott from Newman University. He presented his fascinating research on the experience of teachers teaching in Catholic primary schools in the UK, who are not members of the Catholic tradition. Elliott's presentation disseminated some of the recent findings of his EdD research on the lived experiences of non-Catholic teachers working in Catholic primary schools. With a focus on the latest research and the current situation of Catholic schools, Claire O'Neil, RE Advisor for the Archdiocese of Westminster, spoke of the crisis that many schools face when it comes to recruiting RE teachers.

Dr Teresa O'Donnell, an Irish harpist, professional musician, educator and musicologist, presented a paper on the doctoral research which she is undertaking in the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies, in Mary Immaculate College. Her vibrant paper outlined her investigation of Filipino and Polish liturgical musical practices in Ireland and the rich musical heritages migrant communities bring to communities, parishes and of course schools. During the conference she also played the harp and sang during a beautiful Taize-style evening prayer and during morning prayer each day. These prayer moments were a highlight of the conference and were organised by Mary Immaculate College students and lay Chaplains along with the college Chaplain Fr Michael Wall who teaches theology in MIC.



Featured Papers from  
the Conference

Another excellent keynote, delivered by **Professor Roisin Coll**, Director of the St Andrew's Foundation for Catholic Teachers in the University of Glasgow, focused on Catholic teacher education in Scotland. Roisin identified Scotland as one of the few countries in the world where denominational education is both supported and funded by the state. She outlined the national policy shift toward teaching as a Masters-level profession and the tensions of maintaining a critical mass of committed and highly qualified teachers for Catholic schools. Emeritus Professor John Sullivan's (Liverpool Hope) keynote was also a significant milestone in the conference schedule. He spoke on 'Why the Church and the University need each other' and argued that Catholic colleges and universities operate on the front-line where the wider culture and Church's life intersect. He suggested that, while they are distinct, the Church and the University need each other as each provides resources and perspectives that enhances the other.

A fascinating paper by Professor Stephen McKinney, Clare Fodey, Christopher Hand and Mary Lappin from the University of Glasgow focused on the emotionally intelligent leader in Catholic schools. The research explored how Jesus, as represented in John's Gospel, embodied the traits of an emotionally intelligent leader. Their paper argued that John's gospel provides Catholic educators with examples of Jesus' self-control (Jn 11:5; 11:36; 19:26; 20:2; 13:34-35), his self-awareness (John chapter 4) and social awareness (Jn 8:10-11) as well as his understanding of relationships (John 4:4-26; 8:1-11). Many papers challenged the way participants viewed Catholic education and after each keynote, parallel paper session or expert panel input, there was an opportunity for delegates to come together, to question and share viewpoints and research interests with beginning scholars, PhD students, classroom and university-based academics and distinguished international researchers. The two-day event offered ample opportunities for a profound listening to each other, while engaging in lively dialogue. A main benefit of attending such an event is finding out what is happening in Catholic schools and among Catholic educators in other parts of the globe. This often happens spontaneously in coffee break sessions, in conversation during lunch, or simply in the randomness of sitting next to somebody at a parallel paper session or a keynote. Whatever part of the world delegates came from, they shared much in common. Dr Jill Goudie, Director in Catholic Education in South Australia, spoke in her paper of the challenges Catholic schools face while trying to provide an education that is personally meaningful, faithful to the Church and strategically effective. The conference also facilitated an energetic connection between teachers and researchers as delegates shared emerging research findings and synergies were created between people working in very different contexts. It was exciting to learn of the ground-breaking high-quality research work of Dr Daniel O'Connell, Dr Catherine Stapleton and Dr Donna Doherty from the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (G.R.A.C.E.) programme. This has resulted in the first national research into identity and ethos in Catholic primary and post-primary schools in Ireland.

This conference would not have come to fruition without the work of the Steering Group of NfRCE and in particular, the amazing work of Dr Sean Whittle. He presented a paper on the new Religious Education Directory (RED) which will guide and underpin the rationale and content of Religious Education in all Catholic schools in England and Wales from September 2025. Other papers from Theresa Ferry and Lizzie Rea from the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre focused on the impact that the COVID Pandemic has had on the Centre's ministry. They explored how it influenced the practical living out of their Vision Statement at a time when the normal channels of working with schools and parishes were challenged and they sought to continue to maintain strong relationships and provide initiatives which would allow them to continue to enable young people, families, schools and parish communities to grow in their relationship with Jesus and the Church.





## Featured Papers from the Conference

Abstract from Dr Fiona Dineen, MIC: 2023 is a landmark year for Religious Education in Irish Primary schools with the launch of the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA). After much speculation and intense debate, there is now some clarity on the reconceptualising of the curriculum area of Religious Education, or the 'Patron's Programme,' in this new Framework for Primary Level. This paper considers the place of Religious Education within the vision, principles and competencies of the 2023 Primary Curriculum Framework. It reflects on the future directions for Religious Education, as situated in the new Framework, particularly the challenges and opportunities afforded by the subject area presented and redefined as the Patron's Programme. Furthermore, it will examine the role and relationship of the Patron in supporting Religious Education in the context of this new Framework, examining what is should and ought to be amidst a time of critical change. In particular, it will focus on the suitability and sustainability of current models of provision of continuous professional development of educators in Catholic schools, offering a critique of how such models can sustain the educator in times of fluidity, flux and curricular reform in the Irish context.

Abstract from Dr Maurice Harmon and Dr Daniel O'Connell, MIC: This presentation will describe the religious beliefs, practices and influences of students entering Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland. It will situate this data in the wider context of religious beliefs in Ireland more generally and look at how the student profile fits with the needs for teaching Religious Education in Catholic primary schools today. Since 89% of the primary schools in Ireland have a Catholic patron, the vast majority of the graduates of these sorts of programmes will enter Catholic schools. Will these graduates have the required understanding, knowledge and ability to teach Religious Education in Catholic schools in a manner that is in keeping with the purpose as outlined in the Religious Education curriculum? This paper will explore data gathered through a mixed methods study over three years on the religious beliefs and practices of first year students entering an ITE programme in Ireland. Students (N = 1171) responded to a questionnaire with questions drawn from the Religion section of the European Values Survey (EVS), along with some other demographic questions and 18 individual interviews.

Findings indicated that the majority of these students identify as Catholic, believe in God and a large proportion of them attend religious services on a regular basis. However, there is a complexity, unsurprisingly, to their belief in God. This paper offers important insights into understanding the religious beliefs, religious influences and values systems of those who will be tasked with talking with children about God, wondering about the ethical significance of Christian faith and learning about and from other Christian denominations, faiths and worldviews. These insights are put into conversation with their significance for teaching and teacher education in the future.

Abstract from Dr Maurice Harmon, Dr Cora O'Farrell, Dr Aiveen Mullally, & Dr Jacqui Wilkinson: This paper presents preliminary findings from phase one from a national study in Ireland which affords children an opportunity to share their perspectives of primary level (3rd to 6th class) religious education in their Catholic Schools (n=73). The theoretical framework underpinning the approaches used to uncover and communicate children's religious education experiences situates the child in the centre of all decision making and considerations. Children are important "expert witnesses" (Lodge 2005) of classroom events. Student voice pedagogies have been cited as a powerful educational tool in engaging children in the learning process, affording students increased autonomy over their learning experiences. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations (UN), 1989) provides that children have the right to have their opinions considered, their views respected in decision-making that affects them, and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Prioritising children's participation impacts positively on their self-esteem and confidence; and promotes their overall development, autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience (Harmon, 2021; NCCA, 2020). Fostering authenticity in child voice research has proved challenging, and in order to prevent tokenistic participation, requires researchers to actively involve children in the research process (Montreuil et al., 2021). Such involvement views children as agents rather than objects, and enables children's views to be interpreted through child-centred outlooks, rather than solely through adults' views of their experiences. A number of participatory methodologies were employed throughout the study to achieve this. The findings presented in this paper explore the following themes that are emerging from the data: Children's experiences of religious education; Children's perspectives on core teachings of the faith tradition and Children's perspectives on the teacher in religious education.

# Jesus Social Revolutionary?



FR PETER MCVERRY, SJ  
PETER MCVERRY TRUST

12.50-1.10 PM  
Dr Teresa O'Donnell, classical Irish harpist will give a fee recital

1.15-2.00 PM  
Followed by Peter McVerry who will speak on 'Jesus social revolutionary?'

Come bring your lunch and join us on 22nd February at 1.15 p.m. in the Tara Forum. All are welcome!

**Keep up to date on our events by joining our mailing list. Email [carleigh.garcia@mic.ul.ie](mailto:carleigh.garcia@mic.ul.ie) for more information!**

# IICS Sponsored Events 2023

Screening of Laudato Si' Film: The Letter  
MIC Interfaith Harmony Week 2023

The Letter  
OFF LAUDATO SI' MOVEMENT

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick  
Tara Building T117  
February 1st, St Brigid's Day  
6.00-8.00 pm  
80-minute film followed by Q&A discussion

tróscáire EDII  
Salesian Sisters' Cosmology MIC  
diocese of limerick IICS

Scan for more info & the film's official trailer found on the IICS website

MID WEST INTERFAITH NETWORK

EDII & IICS sponsored  
**Interfaith Dialogue Café**

Come and meet members of the Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Sikh faiths for an informal dialogue café. Ask questions. Explore artefacts. Rotate from table to table and meet members of 5 different faiths. All welcome!

EDII IICS

Wednesday, February 15th from 11.00-1.00  
MIC G10

Announcing in  
**UN Interfaith Harmony Week**  
1-7 February 2023

A forthcoming Spring Series of lectures by members of the MWIN on World Faiths. All are welcome.

- 'The Bahá'í faith in Contemporary Ireland' by Trisha Rainsford in the Lime Tree Theatre on February 7th at 9.00 a.m.
- 'Living Islam' by Najwan Elmagboul in the Lime Tree Theatre on February 21 at 9.00 a.m.
- 'Being Christian by Lylían Fotabong in the Lime Tree Theatre on March 14th at 9.00 a.m.
- 'The Hindu Faith: An introduction' by Yoga Nathan in the Lime Tree Theatre on March 21st at 9.00 a.m.

Sponsored by MIC EDII Office and the IICS

EDII IICS

Professor Gladys Ganiel, Queen's University Belfast

**'Highly Religious Young Catholics in Northern Ireland: Renewing the Catholic Landscape?'**

IICS MIC

# IICS YouTube Channel

Access past events such as conference presentations, lecture series, and more on our YouTube channel. We will also be recording some of the lectures in 2024, so please subscribe for updates.

Featured videos:

- Prof David Phinnemore, 'The EU, Northern Ireland, & Brexit: coming to terms with the protocol'
- David Quinn of the Iona Institute speaks on 'Anti-Catholicism in Ireland'
- Prof David Torevell, 'The Naked Truth: Temptation and the likely "fall" of Catholic education'
- Vivek Da Silva, 'Relationship and Sexuality Education in Schools in Ireland'
- Assoc. Prof. John O'Brien speaks on 'Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church'
- Margaret Murphy on 'Beyond a Single Narrative: Asylum seekers in Ireland'
- Dr Myra Hayes: Imaging the Bible in Stained Glass in 20th Century Irish Churches and Catholic Identity'
- Dr Mary Shanahan, 'The Call to Care: Religious education in the age of Noddings'



# IICS Lecture Series

## Spring 2023

'Highly religious young Catholics in Northern Ireland: Renewing the Catholic landscape?'



Prof Gladys Ganiel, Queen's University Belfast

March 29th from 3.00-4.00 pm  
via Microsoft Teams

Email [carleigh.garcia@mic.ul.ie](mailto:carleigh.garcia@mic.ul.ie) for  
MT link

All are  
welcome!

Prof Gladys Ganiel, Queen's University Belfast, 'Highly religious young Catholics in Northern Ireland: Renewing the Catholic landscape?'

Fr Peter McVerry, SJ, Peter McVerry Trust, 'Jesus Social Revolutionary?'

Dr Lydia Mannion, MIC, 'Beyond Wellbeing: Exploring the relationships between psychological wellbeing, religiosity, and religious coping amongst adolescents'

\*Available on our YouTube channel

## Fr Peter McVerry, SJ

Fr Peter Mc Verry, is a Jesuit priest and pioneer in advocating for social justice and the rights of marginal communities. He is best known for working collaboratively with homeless people in Ireland. He was born in Belfast and was raised in Newry. He was educated by the Christian Brothers and by the Jesuits in Clongowes College. In 1962 he joined the Jesuit community in Ireland. Peter has a

BSc in Chemistry and qualified as a teacher. He also studied philosophy and theology in Milltown Park, Dublin. He is best known in Ireland for setting up the Peter Mc Verry Trust to provide accommodation for the homeless community. Although Peter has now retired from the Trust, he continues to advocate for social justice and inclusion. MIC Chaplaincy and the IICS were delighted to have him speak to staff and students on Ash Wednesday, 2023.

## Jesus Social Revolutionary?



FR PETER MCVERRY, SJ  
PETER MCVERRY TRUST

12.50-1.10 PM  
Dr Teresa O'Donnell, classical  
Irish harpist will give a fee  
recital

1.15-2.00 PM  
Followed by Peter McVerry who  
will speak on 'Jesus social  
revolutionary?'

Come bring  
your lunch and  
join us on 22nd  
February at 1.15  
p.m. in the Tara  
Forum.  
All are welcome!





MIC Chaplaincy and IICS Workshop Autumn 2023  
Above: Right to left, Professor Eugene Wall, Anthony Kelly, Jane Leek, Porticus Foundation and Patricia Kieran

## IICS Event Photos 2023