

FORMATION SESSION 1:

Charism...

“The Charism of the Sisters of Charity is ‘to bring to each person the love, tenderness and concern of Christ for the poor, seeing Christ in Everyone’ (Constitutions: Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia) ‘Actively seeking relevant and appropriate ways for us to proclaim this today’, the Sisters of Charity envisioned Mary Aikenhead Ministries and supported this continuity of their founding story. The charism of the Sisters of Charity, ‘Caritas Christi Urget Nos,’ has been a source of inspiration and purpose for the Sisters and their co-workers from the beginning.”

... Extract from MAM’s Round Table.

	Program and Focus	Guide Notes
Welcome/ Setting the scene and Prayer 10 minutes	This session invites participants into a conversation and reflection about how they understand ‘charism’ and in turn, what it looks like in their respective MAEA college. Opening Prayer attached: (provide copies to participants)	You may also choose to begin with reflective instrumental music.
15- 20 minutes	Resource 1 and 2 are key to this formation session and will inform the discussion questions in Resource 3. For the leader to decide - you may divide the group in half and each half reads one of the resources and then have a discussion on the key points in both articles. Alternatively, if time permits, you may wish for participants to read both articles and spend less time in the unpacking discussion.	It would be important for all participants to have both articles for their future reference.
20-25 minutes	Refer Resource 3 - group discussion. For the Leader to decide: In groups everybody discusses every question, <u>or</u> each group is allocated 2-3 sections. Feedback discussion is important here. The last section of Resource 3 speaks of a ‘way of proceeding’, this is for everyone: What are the opportunities for you and your college going forward?	
5 minutes	Share a 3-5-minute Sisters of Charity YouTube clip – there are many choices. (search YouTube Sisters of Charity) Invite participants to sit quietly and ponder...how the charism is awakened in you?	

Reference Material:

Bible

Now with Enthusiasm: Charism, God's Mission and Catholic Schools Today. Michael Green fms. 2018

YouTube Sisters of Charity - there are many choices, select a 3-5 minute one that gives the feel of the Sisters' ministry

Charism: Promise and Possibility. Sharon Brien & Joanne Hack. Journal of Religious Education 2011, Part 2 (summary of article)

Resource 1:

What is Charism?

Charism is a conceptual and theological term... in scripture Paul drew from the Greek work '*charis*', meaning gift or grace...in English '*charism*' is more simply seen as gift...

St Paul associates charisms with the manifestations of the Spirit, as concrete expressions of the life of God in people...as expressions of God's grace that are necessary for the full and healthy functioning of the community and for its benefit...He describes these gifts as God's way of giving life, fullness and efficacy to God's life in the Church. Complementarity is a central principle, not in the functional sense of there being some advantage in having a balanced organisational chart for the structure of the Church and the role allocation within it, but in a more organic sense of full expression of life in the Body of Christ, with people with their diverse giftedness living as members of this Body...

Paul's concern is for the common good (1 Cor 12:26), for the building up of the Church, and for anything that is conducive to signs of the life of the Spirit. Above all other gifts are faith, hope and charity. These are the ultimate signs that the Spirit is active (1 Cor 12: 31 - 13:13). It is most especially love- and the ways that love finds human expression in patience, graciousness, humility, selfishness, gentleness, forbearance, truthfulness, forgiveness, trust, service and endurance – that provides the surest evidence that life in the Spirit is being incarnated...

There is, therefore, some underpinning consistency of understanding in the Christian Scriptures on the subject of charisms: they are gracious revelations, in time and place, of the life of God made manifest in and among people; they are sourced in faith, induce hope, and are expressed through love and the pursuit of love; they are diverse but complementary, and always at the service of the Church as it undertakes God's mission...

From personal charisms to communally lived spiritualities:

In the Jubilee Year 2000 the Union of Superiors General in Rome took as their theme 'Charism and Spirituality'. Claude Marechal, the Assumptionist Superior General described the founders of religious institutes as people who had some of the 'great gospel ideas' of the Christian story...he went on to say that these ideas had been subsequently taken up by people inspired by those founders who had given individual Christians '*a story to join, a community to which to belong, a work to do, a way to pray, a face of God to see.*' He was describing, in accessible language, how the charism of the founder could grow into something that was a good deal more: a story, a community of mission, a distinctive way of Christian discipleship, and a recognised place in sharing God's mission in the Church. It was in and from these spiritual families that inspirational paths of gospel living and evangelising have stood the test of time and proved perennially fruitful...They have made the gospel present and accessible... offering people a 'doable discipleship'. They have become the spiritualities of the Church, lived and developed by its spiritual families...

The concrete expression of the founder's graced response, in time and place, is inspired and inspiring. It opens the way for the life of the Spirit to irrupt not only in the founder, but in resonant ways also in others who find the founder's way of gospel living to be attractive and accessible... a characteristic way of Christian living and evangelising develops...it is more than simply a clear lens on the gospel for them; it has the effect of fanning their own giftedness into the flame. As the founding experience unfolds and as a community develops and grows, its ways of living and sharing the gospel develop characteristics that are spoken about, written down and symbolised... as more time passes, the wealth of experience and wisdom expands, to the stage where it can be faithfully passed on within the community...It begins to be taught as well as caught. When and if this happens, the community crosses a bridge towards being the custodians and co-creators of a school of Christian spirituality.

Building and sustaining a 'Charismatic Culture':

As spiritual families grow, they inevitably develop cultural expression, as do the sub-strands, the individual communities, and the works of those spiritual families, such as schools. This is not a dangerous by-product to be handled with care. It may indeed carry some dangers, and care is certainly required, but the development of a culture is necessary if a spirituality is to grow from a personal charism.

In the context of the Catholic school, this is something that has long been recognised: *'faith which does not become culture is faith which is not fully received, not assimilated entirely, not lived faithfully.'* – Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977).

Culture is always deeper than a simplistic *how* 'we do things around here'. It is, before that, *who* is doing these things, *with whom* and *for whom*, *why* they are doing them, *what* do they understand themselves to be doing, and *when* and *where*. The *how* is expressive of deeper identity, belief, purpose, and world views...

As a personal charism moves towards becoming a spirituality, and this spirituality is expressed culturally in a living and self-identifying spiritual family, as it must be if the Kingdom is to be incarnated, then the challenge is to keep Christ at its heart. Christ-life, in all the human manifestations that St Paul uses to describe it, must remain the heartbeat of all its mythology, its symbols, its language, its values, its community – building, its formation, and its work. To the degree that it does so, its culture may be called charismatic. To the degree, on the other hand, that members of the community lose touch with that heart of their founding story, then their shared spirituality will dissipate, and their culture – irrespective of any apparent strength or functionality - will fade from being authentically charismatic.

Extracts from:

Now with Enthusiasm: Charism, God's Mission and Catholic Schools Today. Michael Green fms. 2018

Resource 2:

Charism: Promise and Possibility

Sharon Brien & Joanne Hack. Journal of Religious Education 2011, Part 2. -summary of article.

Catholic education in Australia has been enriched by the Charisms on which Catholic schools are founded. Charisms are God's way of letting educators know that there are many ways of seeing, understanding and coming to know coming to know God, who gifts us with both graced promise and endless possibilities.

Founder's story and the history of the order is always more complex and richer than can be shared and experienced, what is exciting in these times is for the original story to be used as a springboard to the current time. How do we uncover the enduring understandings from the Founding story for our own communities?

Reference is made to Marechal's major elements of Charism. Marechal's dimensions invite educators to frame the bigger issues as they remain faithful to the tradition and embrace the many possibilities for change.

A story to enter: all stories are interpreted stories, family, conversations, narratives or scripture. Those who listen to the stories connect with aspects of the story and explore how these intersect with their own experiences. The foundational stories of charisms are best understood with honest questions as to how they connect with what is happening now. Story-telling and story living is a community activity. They build bonds, make identification possible and break barriers and enable us to recognise the common links of our experiences.

A language to speak: it is crucial that the language we use to explore complex questions and ideas is a shared one, which is readily understood by all. This allows communities to clarify their thinking, to explain what they understand and know and consequently to form connections, relationships and name common beliefs. Language is integral to the formation of perception, culture, understanding and reality. When communities share and express common understandings of crucial aspects of their charism, they open up to new ways of being community.

A way to pray: part of the essence of Catholic school communities is their regular celebration of school events, through prayer and liturgical life; this enables a community to find a particular way to centre the life of the community on God.

A work to undertake: Schools are concerned with the process of learning and education. Within that total experience of Catholic schools, we understand that to be people of faith demands that Christians live out the Gospel message and promote Gospel values as central to the Christian identity. The belief that a community, in the name and spirit of the Founder, has a work to undertake that can make a difference and change the world is a valuable, practical and tangible way to embrace the message of the Gospel.

A face of God to see: the face of God is revealed in countless ways in the modern world. This happens in ways that are frequently unplanned, unstructured and unanticipated. Revelation happens when people least expect it as unconsciously as breathing in and breathing out. God is revealed or hidden in the best and worst moments of the lived experiences of a community. Sometimes it is enough to know that and to ask what revelation of God is to be found in a particular experience. Growth with and to God only comes from an openness to possibility.

Charism also provides a community with:

- A way into decision making and action at all levels of the community.
- A foundation to address the question 'how shall we live?'
- Ways to answer the 'why' questions rather than the "what" questions.
- The courage to take up our vocations as baptised members of the Church.
- Countless opportunities for our faith to be known, celebrated, lived and translated into prayer.

Catholic School communities share a rich tradition of beliefs which can inform and give direction to decisions at every level of school life. When communities embrace the possibilities for discussion about their shared motivations, the core business and key purposes of Catholic education become clearer and more focused.

A final marker of the Mission of the Catholic school is the personal call to each person at his/her baptism. The baptised are continually invited to live out this call, to explore the richness of the tradition and to embrace a life of ongoing conversion and faith.

Charism provides the motivations behind who we are, what we do and how we structure and live together as communities. Charisms have sustained school communities and at times there have been ground-breaking new initiatives which have propelled charisms into uncharted future. The story is never finished, never exhausted. Charisms cannot be limited because to do so would be to limit God and the possibilities of the future. Charism continues in all times. It is up to each successive generation to author the chapters of the story for future generations.

While it is possible to draw out aspects of charism to focus on, the ways in which charism is embedded and lived out in a community is in the end a holistic reality, a totality which is transmitted through every aspect of school and community life, every relationship and every decision. It is made manifest in how community members treat the least significant members of the community, how hospitality is offered to the stranger and who finds themselves in the privileged position with reserved seating. It is discovered in the ways the community welcomes new members and invites their contributions to the community. It is evident in what is honoured and acclaimed and what is ignored and overlooked. It encompasses the spiritual, pastoral, academic, administrative and co-curricular dimensions of school life and is manifest in the lived experience of the members of the community. It is never as simple as just telling the story. When the charism is truly embedded in the culture of the community it impacts on decisions and choices at all levels of school life. The gift of charism is drawn on with every decision so that ultimately it becomes an understanding that is simply what we do because in the end it is who we are.

Resource 3:

For Group Discussion and Reflection.

When you think of this MAEA College...

A story to enter...	
	How is the story of the college articulated and told? Are there traditions, occasions and events in the life of the school which tell its story? Does the story tell of times of transition and transformation? Is it clear how people in the college today contribute to, and shape, the story? How is this articulated (verbally and visually) and linked to the developing story of college?
A language to speak...	
	What words phrases, or names are unique or peculiar to your college? Do any of these words or phrases articulate the values that are fundamental to the college identity? Do these phrases contain the challenge of the gospel of Jesus Christ? How is the language of ' <i>By this everyone will know...</i> ' woven into the fabric of dialogue and speech of the college?
A way to pray...	
	How is the prayer life of your college celebrated and promoted? Is prayer, ritual, symbol experienced in authentic ways? Will these be remembered in positive ways by former students? Why so? Are there new opportunities for this community?
A work to undertake...	
	Make a list of the things that have kept you busy this week. How much of this time was bringing others face to face with the person of Jesus Christ? In setting the agendas and priorities which drive your college - is there space and opening for the presence and working of the Holy Spirit?
A face of God to see...	
	Ignatian spirituality teaches that we find God in all people and places. Is the face of God found in the rhythms and routine of work in this college? in the staff room, classrooms, relationships...? What face of God have you shown others, or experienced from another this week?
A group to which to belong...	
	What exactly do you feel you 'belong to' in this MAEA College? Think of some of your students by name, what do you think they feel they belong to.? And what about your colleagues? Do the words, lives, stories and behaviour, activities of former students say anything about your college community? Can you articulate in few sentences what you would like your college community to be like?
A way of proceeding...	
	When you think of Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity, how do they influence and inspire your 'ways of proceeding?' What are the opportunities for you and your college going forward?

Opening Prayer:

We Listen to Scripture:

Jesus said, 'In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also live. On that day you will know that I am in God, and you in me, and I in you'.

John 14: 19-20



Scripture on Mary Aikenhead's grave...

'I comforted the widow, I was an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, to the poor I was a mother.'

Job 29: 14, 16)



We ponder the gifts of Charism...

Charism are gifts of the Holy Spirit...These gifts are for the spiritual life, renewal and development of the Church...Charisms enable the Church to adapt herself to different times and demands in the service of the Gospel. \

They are enabling gifts for ministry within the Church...Mission, cultures and 'the signs of the time' provide the context for both the death of charism and the breakthrough of charism...



Going forward we contemplate...

'How can we live and love as Jesus did, except through the mysterious gift and power which he gives through his Spirit, so that we can become his face, his hands, his heart and body?'

Jean Vanier

