

**Guidelines
for the Use of Church Buildings
by Other Christians
and Other Faiths**

Commission for Ecumenism
and Inter-religious
Relations



Archdiocese of Brisbane



Introduction

Within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, the Church is blessed with some significant infrastructure in terms of buildings. Many of the 100 or so parishes have two or more churches; most have a least one school and there is also an assortment of halls and other structures. Consequently, parishes are often approached by other organisations or individuals for permission to use these facilities for short or long-term.

The Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations has a particular interest in those situations where approaches are made by other Christian communities or other faith traditions (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist). Parishes regularly contact the Commission for advice when these situations arise.

It is important to recognise that the key focus in the decision-making process is hospitality. Making facilities available to other Christian communities is an expression of practical ecumenism. Providing venues for communities from other faith traditions is to offer appropriate interfaith hospitality. However, there are a number of practical matters that also need to be considered before such a decision is made.

These Guidelines, therefore, are an attempt to provide helpful information to parishes. They include Catholic Church documents, which address the issues, as well as a series of questions, which parishes might use to aid in their decision-making processes.

The booklet is divided into four sections:

Section 1 deals with Canon Law provisions, and other principles and Guidelines relevant to this area

Section 2 covers the relationship between the Archdiocese of Brisbane and other Christians.

Section 3 suggests guidelines for decisions about the use of Church buildings by groups outside the Roman Catholic Church.

Section 4 outlines some insurance and risk management considerations.

Appendix 1 Application Form for External Hire

Appendix 2 Parish / School Check List

We hope you find this material helpful and would appreciate any feedback you might wish to provide.

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SECTION 1

What do Church documents say?

It is important to recognise the distinction between consecrated spaces or sacred places, such as churches, chapels and oratories, and other Catholic property such as schools and halls.

The extracts from the Code of Canon Law (below) speak specifically about consecrated spaces, whereas the extract from the Directory (following page) deals with Catholic-owned property in general.

THE CODE OF CANON LAW (in English translation)

Prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society (Collins Liturgical, London, 1983)

Canon 1205: *“Sacred places are those which are assigned to divine worship or to the burial of the faithful by the dedication or blessing which the liturgical books prescribe for this purpose.”*

Canon 1210: *“In a sacred place only those things are to be permitted which serve to exercise or promote worship, piety and religion. Anything out of harmony with the holiness of the place is forbidden. The Ordinary may however, for individual cases, permit other uses, provided they are not contrary to the sacred character of the place.”*

Canon 1214: *“The term church means a sacred building intended for divine worship, to which the faithful have right of access for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship.”*

Canon 1221: *“Entry to a church at the hours of sacred functions is to be open and free of charge.”*

These provisions of the Code of Canon Law bind (as law) all Christ’s faithful of the Latin Rite.

Please note that the “Ordinary” is the diocesan Bishop.

DIRECTORY FOR THE APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES AND NORMS ON ECUMENISM

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity 1993

Sharing Other Resources for Spiritual Life and Activity

137. Catholic churches are consecrated or blessed buildings which have an important theological and liturgical significance for the Catholic community. They are therefore generally reserved for Catholic worship. However, if priests, ministers or communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church do not have a place or the liturgical objects necessary for celebrating worthily their religious ceremonies, **the diocesan Bishop may allow them the use of a church or a Catholic building** and also lend them what may be necessary for their services. Under similar circumstances, permission may be given to them for interment or for the celebration of services at Catholic cemeteries.

138. Because of developments in society, the rapid growth of population and urbanization, and for financial motives, **where there is a good ecumenical relationship and understanding between the communities, the shared ownership or use of church premises over an extended period of time may become a matter of practical interest.**

139. **When authorization for such ownership or use is given by the diocesan Bishop**, according to any norms which may be established by the Episcopal Conference or the Holy See, **judicious consideration should be given to the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament**, so that this question is resolved on the basis of a sound sacramental theology with the respect that is due, while also taking account of the sensitivities of those who will use the building, e.g., by constructing a separate room or chapel.

140. Before making plans for a shared building, the authorities of the communities concerned should first **reach agreement as to how their various disciplines will be observed**, particularly in regard to the sacraments. Furthermore, **a written agreement should be made** which will clearly and adequately take care of all questions which may arise concerning financial matters and the obligations arising from church and civil law.

141. **In Catholic schools and institutions, every effort should be made to respect the faith and conscience of students or teachers who belong to other Churches or ecclesial Communities.** In accordance with their own approved statutes, the authorities of these schools and institutions should take care that clergy of other Communities have every facility for giving spiritual and sacramental ministrations to their own faithful who attend such schools or institutions. As far as circumstances allow, **with the permission of the diocesan Bishop** these facilities can be offered on the Catholic premises, including the church or chapel.

142. In hospitals, homes for the aged and similar **institutions conducted by Catholics, the authorities should promptly advise priests and ministers of other Communities of the presence of their faithful** and afford them every facility to visit these persons and give them spiritual and sacramental ministrations under dignified and reverent conditions, **including the use of the chapel.**

These principles and norms guide the involvement of the Archdiocese on the ecumenical journey. They offer helpful considerations on practical issues which arise through ecumenical contacts.

(Please note: Some sections above were highlighted in bold by the editors of this booklet.)

SECTION 2

The Relationship of the Archdiocese of Brisbane with other Christians

Eastern Catholic Churches

The Universal Catholic Church is, in fact, a communion of 23 Churches, 22 of which use liturgical and spiritual practices inherited from their Eastern Christian roots.

The **Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite, Syro-Malabar and Ukrainian Churches** all have their own Archbishops/Bishops based in Australia and these Bishops (Eparchs) are members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. There are **Maronite, Melkite and Ukrainian parishes in Brisbane. The Chaldean Archbishop in Sydney has designated a parish in Brisbane “The Good Shepherd”, but this parish has not been implemented yet.** A number of priests from the **Syro-Malabar Church** (Indian) are working in parishes of the Archdiocese of Brisbane and the community has its own chaplain.

The **Armenian, Coptic, Russian and Syrian Churches** have their own priests working in Sydney and /or Melbourne.

As members of these Churches, along with members of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church, are all in communion with the Pope (Bishop of Rome), it is assumed that hospitality will naturally be extended to these communities.

Other Christians

Since the Second Vatican Council relations with other Christians in Australia have continued to grow and now strong bonds of respect and cooperation exist. This is especially true for the Archdiocese of Brisbane, which belongs to Queensland Churches Together (QCT) and has a Covenant with the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane.

In 1994 a new national ecumenical body, the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), was formed and the Roman Catholic Church was a foundation member.

Members of the **National Council of Churches in Australia** are:

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| Anglican Church of Australia | Lutheran Church of Australia |
| Antiochian Orthodox Church | Mar Thoma Church |
| Armenian Apostolic Church | Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) |
| Assyrian Church of the East | Roman Catholic Church |
| Chinese Methodist Church in Australia | Romanian Orthodox Church |
| Churches of Christ in Australia | The Salvation Army |
| Congregational Federation of Australia | Serbian Orthodox Church |
| Coptic Orthodox Church | Syrian Orthodox Church |
| Greek Orthodox Church | Uniting Church in Australia |
| Indian Orthodox Church | |

In 2004 members of the National Council of Churches in Australia signed a Covenant, one element of which was:

Dimension Two: Shared Use of Physical Resources

We AGREE together

- ⊕ *To support initiatives for sharing physical resources, such as buildings, and to encourage consultation between the appropriate governing bodies of our churches before new major developments are undertaken*

This was signed by: Anglican Church of Australia, Assyrian Church of the East, Churches of Christ in Australia, Congregational Federation of Australia, Coptic Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Lutheran Church of Australia, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church in Australia, The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is appropriate that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane honour the spirit of this NCCA agreement and lend its support for the sharing of physical resources, including buildings.

SECTION 3

A Guide to Decision-making

The following questions should be considered before responding to requests to use Catholic buildings. We strongly encourage you to use the attached Application Form that needs to be completed by parties wishing to use Catholic buildings.

General considerations:

- ⊕ Does the proposed activity sit comfortably with Catholic teachings, ethics and moral principles?
- ⊕ Is the proposed activity likely to conflict with normal parish events (e.g. Mass and other sacraments) in terms of timing, location, parking etc? If another community is using the church they need plenty of time to set up beforehand and to socialise afterwards.
- ⊕ Is the building in good repair and a suitable size to accommodate the anticipated numbers attending the event?
- ⊕ Where are the participants coming from? Local/Interstate/international?
- ⊕ Will the event be recorded (audio and/or video)? Who will do the recording? Will there be media present? Will photographs be taken? Consent from participants regarding any of the above may be needed.
- ⊕ Will there be a member of the parish present at the function? Is training on the use of electrical equipment needed? Who will conduct the training? Who will lock up at the end of the function? Who is responsible for cleaning and returning the building to its original condition?
- ⊕ Are children involved in the event? Who will supervise these children? Is a consent form for parents/guardians provided? Do supervisors have a Blue Card? How will these children be transported to the building? Are there sufficient carparks and/or a safe drop-off area for the expected number of children? Has a risk assessment on the activity been carried out and conveyed to those leading the event?
- ⊕ How will rent or hire fees be charged and paid?
- ⊕ Risk management (See Section 4 of this booklet)

Application by a group from another Christian Community:

- ⊕ Is the activity a Worship Service? If so, it would be appropriate to use a church/ consecrated space, otherwise the event should take place in a hall.
- ⊕ Is the group making the request in good standing with their own Church? Can they provide a letter of introduction from a significant leader in their own Church (e.g. Bishop, Moderator) to support this?

- ✦ Is the group from a Church which is a member of the National Council of Churches in Australia (see page 5)? Local Catholic communities may have good ecumenical relations with other churches (e.g. Presbyterians, Baptists) and so feel confident in offering them hospitality. Queries from other Christian communities not known locally can be referred to the Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations.
- ✦ Is the request for one-off event or on a regular long-term basis? A written agreement covering all appropriate practical issues needs to be signed by the Parish Priest (or Parish Manager, if applicable) if this is a long-term arrangement. (See Appendix 1)

Application by a group from another Faith Tradition (i.e. Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist etc):

- ✦ Is the activity a Worship Service? In the case of other faith traditions it would be advisable to offer a hall rather than a “consecrated space”. Such a space is “assigned to divine worship” within the Roman Catholic Church (Canon 1205). Worship in another faith tradition would not be appropriate in a “consecrated space”. However, this is not only in consideration of the sensitivity of Catholics/ Christians. Jews, Muslims and others would not be comfortable worshipping in the presence of a crucifix, statues etc.
- ✦ Does the facility meet the needs of the particular faith tradition? For example, if the Jewish community wished to provide food, does the kitchen meet Kosher standards? If the Muslim community required a prayer space, are there separate suitable ablution areas for males and females to use before prayer? If incense or smoke is to be used will this interfere with the smoke alarms?

SECTION 4

Insurance / Risk Management Considerations

Once a parish is satisfied that the activity proposed by the other Christian community or faith **tradition is appropriate according to Catholic teachings, ethos and moral principles**, then it is important to consider issues around insurance cover and risk management. The following questions may provide a helpful guide:

1. What specific activity is planned?
2. What are the planned arrangements for safety of the participants?
3. If the activity involves children (or anyone under 18), do the leaders hold a current Blue Card? Have risks been identified and mitigated?
4. Does the particular faith community have public liability insurance in place? (The Catholic parish should expect that the minimum amount of public liability cover in place by the relevant faith community would be \$20M. Evidence for the existence and currency of such public liability insurance (a certificate of currency) should also be obtained from the relevant faith community's insurer. If more specific advice is required as to the adequacy of cover then the relevant parish should contact CCI and provide details.)
5. Does the relevant public liability policy for such activities cover the other faith community for its civil liability for personal injury or damage to property occurring in the course of such activities?
6. What is the limit of Indemnity for the particular public liability policy?
7. If unsure as to safety (question 2 above), has this activity been referred to the relevant insurer for both the Catholic Church and also the insurer for the other faith community?

For further information contact:

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APPENDIX 1

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

Application Form for External Hire of Parish/School Facilities

Part A: To be completed by the individual/group requesting the Facility

Company/Group Name: _____

Person making the booking on behalf of the group: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Date of Function/Event: _____ Start: _____ Finish: _____

Expected number of people attending Function/Event: Total _____ Children _____

Who will supervise these children? _____

If the activity involves children (or anyone under 18), do the leaders hold a current Blue Card? Yes No

Estimated number of participants coming from? Local _____ Interstate _____ International _____

What specific activity is planned? _____

What are the planned arrangements for safety of the participants? _____

Description of Facilities needed for Function/event _____

Does the faith community have public liability insurance in place? (Attach a copy) Yes No

Will there be media present? Yes No

Will photographs be taken? Yes No

Will the event be recorded (audio and/or video)? Yes No

Who will do the recording? _____

Is training on the use of electrical equipment needed? Yes No

As the person undertaking the booking, I am responsible for cleaning and returning the building to its original condition. I am also responsible to meet the cost of hiring a professional cleaner should the building need further cleaning to bring the building back to its original condition.

Signature of the person making the booking: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 2

Part B: To be completed by the Parish/School that govern the Facility

Name of the Person handling the booking:

Expression of practical ecumenism and the offer of interfaith hospitality questions: (Complete as many questions as applicable. Parishes might use these questions as a check list to aid in their decision-making processes)

Consecrated Places (church, chapel, oratories):

- Is the requested facility a consecrated place (church, chapel, oratories)? Yes No
- Is the activity a Worship Service? Yes No
- Does the group requesting the consecrated place have full communion with the Catholic Church? Yes No
- Is the group requesting the consecrated place a member of NCCA? Yes No
- Is the group making the request in good standing with their own Church? Yes No
- Is the request for one-off event or on a regular long-term basis? Yes No
- Has the hiring of the consecrated place been authorized by the PP or the Bishop? Yes No

Other properties:

- Does the facility meet the needs of the particular faith tradition? Yes No
- Do the kitchen facilities meet "Kosher" standards (for Jewish functions)? Yes No
- Are there separate ablution areas for males & females to use before (Muslim) prayer? Yes No
- If incense or smoke is to be used will this interfere with the smoke alarms? Yes No
- Has the faith community provided evidence for the currency of public liability insurance? Yes No
- Does the proposed activity sit comfortably with Catholic teachings, ethics and moral principles? Yes No
- Is the proposed activity likely to conflict with normal parish events on the day? Yes No
- Is the requested building a suitable size to accommodate the anticipated numbers? Yes No
- Are there sufficient parking spaces to accommodate the anticipated numbers? Yes No
- Will there be a member of the Parish present at Function/Event? Yes No

Will the hire of facilities attract fees or charges?

Yes No

How will rent or hire fees be charged and paid? _____

Who will be providing training, if needed, on the use of electrical equipment needed?

Has the hiring of the facility been authorized by the Parish Priest?

Yes No

Signature of the person handling the booking: _____ Date: _____