
*This document on the **Spirituality of the Patrician Brothers** was written by a person who attended Patrician Brothers College, Fairfield, as a student for eight years and who has taught there for many more years than that.*

He wrote this as an essay in 2005 for his university studies, and has given full permission for the document to be placed on our Patrician website.

RESEARCH THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION THAT INFORMS THE ETHOS AND IDENTITY OF THE SCHOOL YOU WORK IN and WENT TO, OR KNOW ABOUT.

OUTLINE AND DISCUSS SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS SPIRITUAL TRADITION.

DISCUSS SOME OF THE WAYS THIS TRADITION CONTRIBUTES TO NURTURING SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THIS EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Historical Background of the Brothers in Australia _____

On March 7th 1883, the first Patrician Brothers were welcomed to Australia, who took charge of the first Patrician Brothers' school, St John's College in Maitland. Little did these two pioneering men, Brother Domenic O'Neill and Brother Fintan O'Neill know the impact their order was to have on generations of Australian young boys to come, over the following 120 years.

Established at a crisis time in denominational schooling in the colony of Australia, the Patrician Brothers was one of several Catholic Orders from Ireland, France, Britain and Italy that were invited to form communities in Australia to educate young Catholic boys and girls. The Church Act of 1862 had seen the official withdrawal of Government funds to denominational schools, and against this backdrop of schools run on shoestring budgets, reliant on modest Parish contributions and

“School fees (which) were 1 shilling per week, and many students were not able to even pay that” (1)

that the Brothers set about establishing a number of communities primarily in New South Wales.

Early communities were formed in Bathurst, Goulburn, Redfern, Dubbo, Armidale, Wagga, Forest Lodge, Orange and Ryde by the early 1890's. Of these only Holy Cross Ryde operates today, with Patrician Colleges also at Granville, Blacktown, Liverpool and Fairfield. The focus of the Patrician Brothers for this paper will on the community at Patrician Brothers' College Fairfield, which was established in 1953, having celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2003.

What is Spirituality? _____

The notion of a Patrician spirituality is interesting, as many of the Brothers would struggle to identify what this is. In my discussions with several of the Brothers, many are uncomfortable with the concept of any 'charism' that permeates the order. This reflects their great humility, and service to others, as they have never been an order to seek fanfare, nor crave adulation from the communities they serve. Given the legacy that the Brothers have left in the school communities they have established, it is timely to define 'spirituality'. The task and challenge for lay teachers in schools founded by an order is to maintain and enliven the charism that exists. Treston (1988), believes that the issues of spirituality is a 'foundational one' (page 6), in terms of the role of teachers in integrating the secular and religious aspects of life in general, both at school and society in general. This is especially the case for teachers who work in schools where the influence of the leadership and direction of the order has declined or disappeared altogether. Treston's assumption that;

“the word “spirituality” needs to be explored so that teachers may locate their own understanding of the word as it arises out of their particular vocation of teaching.” (2)

is particularly relevant for teachers in such schools, and would be worthwhile to include as a significant section of orientation and induction programs for new teachers to schools, with such specific local needs.

Spirituality is at the essence of our existence, and is as much a part of our life as is eating, drinking and breathing. It is not something that we focus on for a portion of our day. If we accept that religion is the search for meaning, and making sense of the mystery of life, then it follows that spirituality is how we see and integrate with God on a daily basis, in our relationships with others and God. Spirituality is based on our relationships developed in the communities we exist in. Spirituality then leads to the development of the whole person – intellectually, socially and spiritually. Spirituality is in the living of the 'now', rather in the hope of the 'future'.

The Patrician ideal can be summed up as a 'dedication to youth to build up the full man, whatever his environment is'. Development of the whole person is a by-product of the students that progress through Patrician schools. On the news page of their web-page the slogan captures their spirituality well;

“Through life giving brotherhood and prayer we strive for a union of hearts and minds which will transform our witness and service.” (3)

It is not a story of big schools with big names. It is one of men with large hearts, who were part of the Christian community and who made youth realize their commitments to God and society. They live in their own community which forms a central part of their spirituality.

“Living in community or proximity, adherents strengthened one another in their particular spiritual disciplines and were a witness to the surrounding community by their lives.” (4)

The Founder Bishop Daniel Delany_____

The Order of the Patrician Brothers was founded in 1808, and the source of inspiration in the many challenges the order has accepted over the past 198 years was Bishop Daniel Delany. Delany was born in the small Irish village, Paddock in 1747. Whilst the public practicing of Catholicism was outlawed by the British, he was influenced by the local Parish Priest, and subsequently studied in France to gain his priestly education. He was ordained a priest in 1770, lectured in France until he returned to Ireland in 1776.

He found a different Ireland upon his return, where abject poverty had given way to lawlessness, as a result of the hunger and misery experienced by its people. He became dismayed with the drunkenness, fighting and the lack of observance of the Catholic religion, and having considered returning to France, consented to his mother's request to remain in Ireland.

In his subsequent work as an assistant priest in Tullow, near Dublin, he began to realize that the lack of religious observance was linked to a lack of education in the community in general. He began his life-long quest for the education of young people particularly the youth in his Parish. One of his major contributions was to train young men to assist in establishing and running Sunday classes in the Church. In these classes children were taught Catholic doctrine.

In 1783 he was consecrated a Bishop at 36 years of age, and he continued to work hard to establish Sunday schools for what modern Catholics see as the work as catechists. As a result of his continuing work, and the inspiration he gave to Catholics around him, he founded two Religious orders, the Sisters of Saint Brigid, which are commonly known as the Brigidines, and the Brothers of Saint Patrick, which are now known as the Patrician Brothers. He spent the last 6 years of his life helping the Sisters and Brothers in educating the young in his diocese, before he died in 1814.

Delany founded these congregations after he had seen how deprived the youth of Ireland were owing to the turbulent times in which they lived. His work and the challenge to the Brothers was to serve the 'poorest of the poor'. This was more than the just to serve those devoid of the physical necessities of life, but also to serve those poor in spirit and soul. From his death bed, Delany gave his mission to the Brothers "To love God and live in peace and charity".

*Justice and Peace*_____

The order has a strong commitment to justice and peace.

“ . . . we show a preference for those who are in greatest need and discriminate positively in favour of those who are marginalised. In our work across the globe with the poor and disadvantaged we recognise that our apostolic activity is changing from one of authority and control to one of empowering others. Today Patrician Brothers work directly to alleviate the effects of injustice and to fight the causes of injustice. We do this because we believe that an option for the poor is inseparable from the option for Jesus and his Gospel” (5)

Today's Patrician Brothers live in many different communities around the world, serving in countries as diverse as Kenya, India, Papua New Guinea, Australia,

Ireland and the United States. They work in a variety of countries, and their work has branched broader than the fields of education. In the 21st century the Patrician Brothers place great emphasis on their community living by reasserting Bishop Delany's drive to "lead one another to follow Christ more closely."

In recent years the Brothers have made a commitment to vibrant community living as well as to address some of the critical needs of society at the local level.

*Saint Patrick*_____

“Education is the main means in which the Brothers proclaim their love of Christ to people. However, a number of Brothers are involved in chaplaincy, parish ministry, and adult education. In all ministries in which they are involved, the Brothers are guided by St Patrick's spirit to find “Christ in the heart of all people.” (6)

Bishop Delany formally declared The Patron Saint of the order as St Patrick, thus bestowing on them a great spiritual legacy. Like St Patrick, the Brothers strive to see Christ in one and all, as is reflected in the Breastplate of St Patrick, which is fundamental in the prayer life of Patrician communities. St Patrick whilst born in England, is seen as the father of Catholicism in Ireland, having spread the news of Christianity across the country in the 5th century.

“ . . . , St. Patrick established the Catholic Church throughout Ireland on lasting foundations: he travelled throughout the country preaching, teaching, building churches, opening schools and monasteries, converting chiefs and bards, and everywhere supporting his preaching with miracles.” (7)

What stands out and can be related to the Brothers and their work for the past 200 years is that St Patrick through his writings had a sense of being called by God to the work he was to do, and he then went about doing God's work with a sense of determination and modesty. This exemplifies the approach and attitude of the Brothers in the work in the communities they have served.

*Patrician Spirituality at Fairfield*_____

Patrician Brothers' College Fairfield has a particularly unique community spirit. Having been a student at the College through High school, I had little appreciation of the charism or spirit that characterized the College. Being responsible for the Religious Education for the past 7 years, I have become more acutely aware of the qualities that is the legacy of Patrician education for the past 50 years. Currently, there are two Brothers at the College, Brother Richard, who has been associated for the past 48 years with the Fairfield community, and Brother Domenic, who has been a Patrician for the past 7 years, having previously been a Majellan Brother at Greystanes. The last serving Patrician Principal was Brother Bernard Bulfin, who served for 11 years at Fairfield from 1991 – 2001. In speaking to a number of the Brothers about their charism, and unique spirituality, they are quite humble and even uncomfortable about what it is they are. Brother Aengus Kavanagh, who was the Superior General in the 1980's has alluded in discussions that the Brothers just 'did what they did', in living out their vocation. Hill (1988) notes that for

Priests “ . . . ***though trained extensively in theology, were uncomfortable with spirituality; therefore they were reluctant to direct the laity in spiritual matters.***” The Brothers experienced this culture of being somewhat ambivalent towards a sense of Patrician spirituality.

For the purposes of this paper, a survey was conducted of students at the College. The survey was conducted in two groups. The survey of 25 students in Year 7, were all new students to Patrician Brothers schooling in 2004. The survey of 20 Year 12 students was more random, reflecting a cross-section of students in the senior body, most of whom had been at the College for all of their High school. The questions were framed to ascertain the students' understanding of the Patrician Brothers' charism on their journey through Fairfield Patrician Brothers. The survey results and survey can be found in the appendix of this paper. Each of the key aspects of the charism of the Patrician Brothers is listed and commented on as follows.

HOSPITALITY AND WELCOME

There is a strong sense of hospitality and a sense of welcome at the College. The College has a unique culture and spirit which is a legacy of the Patrician Brothers who were the pioneers and stewards of this College community for 48 years. This has resulted in the boys who attend the College from Fairfield and the surrounding districts, to have a strong sense of belonging, and ownership of the values the Patrician Brothers represent. Question 7 indicates that whilst this is important to Year 7 students, with 24% ranking this the most important, the Year 12 students see this as highly important with a total of 85% placing this in the first 3 choices. This would indicate that students who have experienced the culture of the Patrician education, do see the hospitable and welcoming nature of the College as an important value in their life at the school.

PRAYER LIFE AND THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS AND THE INFLUENCE OF ST PATRICK

There is a strong witness to faith, with Christ being central in the spiritual dimension of the College. St Patrick as the Patron Saint of the order is valued highly by both sets of students, as reflected in Question 6 and 8 where St Patrick is clearly ranked first for both Years 7 and 12 students. St Patrick's prayer 'The Breastplate of St Patrick' is recited daily, and is found framed in each classroom in the College. The reciting of the Breastplate on a daily basis bears witness to the centrality of Jesus in the life of the College, which is clearly perceived by the Year 7 students in Question 7. The Year 12 students also reflect an understanding of the prayer life at the College. The prayer and Liturgical life at the College is rich and varied, and whilst the boys enter into this at their own comfort zone, there is a genuine respect and reverence for the occasions that the College – whether in a full community, or a more intimate class setting – enters into these moments of grace. Voluntary Monday prayer services at lunchtimes, lead by the staff are well attended, and first Friday Masses at lunchtimes are regularly full. Mary as the Patroness of the College is pivotal in the prayer life, with the Rosary recited each day in October. The Brothers have a great love and devotion of Our Lady, which is reflected in College life. Statues of Our Lady and her role as the Mother of God, and the simplicity of her life in service to God and others, are instilled in the boys in a

gentle yet meaningful manner. The strong sense of respect and reverence amongst the students, displayed at assemblies and Liturgies, is a result of the direction and influence of the Brothers. The Brothers were always extremely affirming of the good things, and promoted this among the boys, particularly in this area. In the words of Brother Bernard, "If you don't work on your strengths, they will become your weaknesses." Many of the good things that happen at the College are affirmed, which heightens the sense of community and sense of belonging that exists.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SERVICE TO THE POOR

There is a strong Social Justice arm at the College, and the Brothers have always felt the need to serve the poor. The original call to serve the needs of the poor was one of the main reasons that the College was established in 1953, when the Brothers were called to establish a Catholic school at Fairfield. The Brothers have educated 1000's of young men over this time, many whose parents could afford little fees. Often parents would offer their services at the College in return for reduced or no fees at all. The Brothers would often assist the needy and destitute in the local area, where frequently people would knock at the monastery for food and clothes. Whilst this still occurs on occasions today, the College still gives witness to the needs of others throughout the year. Recently, \$11 500 was raised for Caritas Australia through the Lenten 'Project Compassion' Appeal, which has now raised over \$70 000 in the past 7 years. Most of this is through daily contributions to the box as it is passed around in class. The College also supports Jeans for Genes and the Spastic Centre annually, whilst the SVDP is supported in the Winter Appeal and particularly in the Christmas Hamper Appeal with hampers often totaling in excess of thousands of dollars. Whilst these are modest efforts, again this is the legacy of the Brothers who always were more concerned about others, rather than extra creature comforts for themselves.

COMMUNITY VALUES

The Brothers have an excellent standing and reputation in the community at large. They have instilled these same qualities in the young men who have progressed through this College, by encouraging all to have pride in their achievements, and to develop the self-discipline needed to be wholesome young men. This aspect of the spiritual education the Brothers play in the life of their students cannot be underestimated. Delany challenged the Brothers to reach out to the poor – not just the spiritually poor, but those bereft of spirit. The Brothers focus in Patrician communities on the development of the whole person, and whilst there is the focus on the academic, students are encouraged, recognized and assisted in a variety of other fields such as the cultural, artistic, sporting and philosophical areas of life. Students are recognized for artworks, musical talents at assemblies, chess, debating and public speaking achievements, as well as sporting prowess and victories. Students who are well balanced and encouraged to achieve in all areas of life where ever their talents and gifts may be, are more likely to be comfortable to enter into the aspects of community that allow for spiritual development and growth. The Retreat program at the College is highly regarded by the students, again displaying they are receptive with this aspect of College life.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

There is a strong sense of community that has developed at the College, which has translated to a strong sense of belonging. Whilst the Year 7 students in the survey did not see this as important force at the school, the Year 12 students believed this was clearly the most important factor in life at the school, with all but one student having it ranked in the top 3 places, and 65% (13 students) having it ranked first. The College does often a caring environment, where each individual is valued for who they are. The Breastplate calls on us to see the 'Christ' in each other, and through the sense of welcome and hospitality, serving the needs of the less fortunate and realizing the importance of prayer life, we are able to reach out to others and accept each person for who they are. This has resulted in the boys who attend the College from Fairfield and the surrounding districts, to have a strong sense of belonging, and ownership of the values the Patrician Brothers represent.

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PATRICIAN BROTHERS COLLEGE FAIRFIELD

SURVEY

INFLUENCE OF THE PATRICIAN BROTHERS ON STUDENTS

This survey is for students at patrician Brothers' College Fairfield to gather information about the impact of Patrician schooling on students and the influence that the Brothers has on young men

1. Did you go to Patrician Brothers Primary for Years 5 and 5?

- Yes
- No

2. If no, which school did you go to for Year 6?

3. List the Brothers you know exist in the Patrician Brothers?

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4. What do you understand about ;
St Patrick?

5. Bishop Delaney?

6. Rank the significant days in the calendar life of this school;

- First day at school
- St Patricks Day
- Mothers/Fathers Day events
- Father and Son camp
- Christmas liturgy
- Walkathon
- Swimming carnival
- Athletics carnival
- Prefect Investiture
- Retreat days

7. Rank the qualities that you see as dominant at school

- A sense of welcome
- The importance of prayer life
- Service to the poor
- Centrality of Jesus in the life of the school
- The building of community

8. Rank the following in order of importance to the Patrician Brothers

- St Patrick
- Celtic Cross
- Breastplate of St Patrick
- Bishop Delaney
- The Rosary
- Blue and Blue

- Irish connection

YEAR 7 RESPONSES

All of the students surveyed were new to the College in 2004. There were 25 students in the survey sample.

Question 6: Rank the significant days in the calendar life of this school:

Responses - Ranked:	1	2	3
First day at school	16%	20%	4%
St Patrick's day	72%	28%	na
Mother's/Father's day events	4%	0	16%
Father and son camp	4%	0	20%
Christmas Liturgy	0	36%	20%
Walkathon	0	4%	0
Swimming Carnival	0	4%	4%
Athletics Carnival	0	0	8%
Prefect Investiture	0	0	4%
Retreat days	4%	8%	24%

Question 7: Rank the qualities that you see as dominant at school

Responses - Ranked:	Ranked 1	2	3
A sense of welcome	24%	8%	8%
The importance of Prayer Life	12%	32%	40%
Service to the poor	12%	44%	16%
Centrality of Jesus in the life of the school	48%	8%	24%
The building of community	4%	8%	12%

Question 8: Rank the following in order of importance for the Patrician Brothers

Responses - Ranked:	Ranked 1	2	3
St Patrick	64%	24%	12%
Celtic Cross	0	8%	8%
Breastplate of St Patrick	8%	20%	24%
Bishop Delany	16%	40%	12%
The Rosary	8%	8%	12%
Blue and Blue	0	4%	28%
Irish connection	4%	4%	4%

YEAR 12 RESPONSES

All of the students surveyed were new to the College in 2004.

There were 20 students in the survey sample.

Question 6: Rank the significant days in the calendar life of this school:

Responses - Ranked:	1	2	3
First day at school	10%	10%	10%
St Patrick's day	75%	20%	5%
Mother's/Father's day events			25%
Father and son camp			
Christmas Liturgy		20%	25%
Walkathon	5%	5%	
Swimming Carnival			
Athletics Carnival		5%	
Prefect Investiture		15%	10%
Retreat days	10%	25%	25%

Question 7: Rank the qualities that you see as dominant at school

Responses - Ranked:	Ranked 1	2	3
A sense of welcome	20%	35%	30%
The importance of Prayer Life	10%	40%	35%
Service to the poor	0	0	10%
Centrality of Jesus in the life of the school	15%	5%	15%
The building of community	65%	20%	10%

Question 8: Rank the following in order of importance for the Patrician Brothers

Responses - Ranked:	Ranked 1	2	3
St Patrick	55%	45%	na
Celtic Cross	5%	20%	5%
Breastplate of St Patrick	30%	30%	5%
Bishop Delany	0	0	55%
The Rosary	0	0	10%
Blue and Blue	5%	5%	10%
Irish connection	0	0	15%