

**Board of Education Report**  
**Presentation by Dr Jacqui Wilkinson**  
**Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the ongoing work on the redevelopment of the *Follow Me* Religious Education programme for Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Since 1998, the Government has given school patrons the legal right and responsibility to develop a programme for their school which “underpins and supports the characteristic spirit” or “ethos” of the school. This continues in the new primary curriculum framework launched in 2023. It clearly states that there are five curricular areas and what is now named the Patron’s Programme ‘is taught in addition to these five curricular areas’. A time allocation is provided in the official documentation. For Church of Ireland schools the Patron’s Programme is *Follow Me*.

Twenty-five years ago, I commenced work as editor and co-ordinator of a new programme for RE, called *Follow Me*. It was a move from a teachers’ manual so that RE with textbooks was regarded as having the same status as other subject areas. We wanted to see the books on classroom shelves and in school bags. The project was chaired by the then Bishop of Meath, Bishop Richard Clarke, and we were aware that this would inevitably need review and revision, and that the next iteration would be online. I co-ordinated the project and edited the books, and the programme was introduced to schools throughout the country over the following 10 years.

Twenty-five years later I am privileged to be back working with this exciting newly developed *Follow Me* programme for a new generation of children in our schools.

So, a new logo, with designed components on this slide. The bird, the hand, the italic script of ‘follow’ leading to the strength of the word ‘Me’, echoing Jesus’ call to Follow Him.

*Follow Me* is both a curriculum and a programme, The curriculum dates from 2001.

A decision was taken after consultation by the General Synod Board of Education to retain the *Follow Me* curriculum with its aims, strands, and associated core content and to create a re-developed programme of delivery which is digitally based.

The aims of the 2001 curriculum are retained. The aims of Religious Education are to enable children:

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1. To develop a knowledge and understanding of the beliefs, worship and witness of the Christian faith, and in particular of the Church of Ireland and other principal reformed traditions;
2. To explore the biblical witness to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
3. To develop their own religious beliefs, values and practices through a process of personal search and discovery;
4. To develop an awareness of and a sensitivity towards those of other faiths and none.

As are the strands:

1. Celebrations, festivals, ceremonies and customs
2. Sacred writings, stories and key figures
3. Beliefs
4. Sacred places, worship and symbols
5. Moral values and attitudes
6. Personal search – The natural world, relationships and moral values, ultimate questions
7. Awareness of those of other faiths and none

All content of the *Follow Me* programme is designed to fulfil the aims and is located in one or more of the strands.

The redevelopment project commenced a couple of years ago but has really moved on with the launch of the new supporting *Follow Me* website in November 2024 – serving as a resource bank for schools and the point of access for schools to purchase the new slide decks for the *Follow Me* books.

Also in November, a team of 10 teachers began working from annotated books to create slide decks for the 3rd and 4th class books on a bright and engaging template. These were then edited and in March and April 2025, the lessons were piloted in more than 50 schools. They will then be ready for publication later this summer for schools to purchase as downloads for September. What was introduced twenty-five years ago as a book for the shelf will be stored and accessible on the class whiteboard, whilst classroom displays and copybooks will provide a record of children's work.

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Then as you see, we are immediately moving on to the 1st and 2nd class books and the writing team of teachers had their first meeting in May 2025.

As you will read in the report (p. 203) there is a committee behind the project, however, as editor of the project, I would like to publicly thank and recognise the committee and those who have played large or small parts in bringing this first stage of the development project to completion. First, to one of the committee members, Ms Carolyn Good (a very busy teaching principal of 3rd and 4th classes) who has worked alongside me in editorial work and in slide creation. Carolyn is one of the team of 10 teachers from many parts of the country who worked on the slide creation. Thank you to the numerous people from every part of the country who recorded audio Bible stories, ensuring variety of voices. Thank you to the more than 50 classrooms (listed on a slide) who volunteered to pilot the lessons and to the BEd 3 students in DCU who also took a lesson each to review through the lenses of accessibility and inclusion.

I may have the responsibility for the project and the timeline, but it truly takes a country to bring the lessons to the standard we want, with resources as good (if not better) than those in other curricular areas.

People have been generous with time and resources

Those working in mission organisations who came alongside me to update our understanding of and teaching about their work (CMSI, Leprosy Mission and Bible Society).

Teachers who added lesson information – Claire Murray from Gartan NS, Sophie Ray from Rathfarnham NS and the Lighten our Darkness Project.

An Gloine and Dr Susan Hood for generosity with Stained Glass window images from the David Lawrence collection.

Buíochas leis an dochtúir Rita Kelly ó Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise a rinne aistriúcháin dom i gcomhair paidreacha agus áiseanna. Tá sin an – tábhachtach dúinn.

Thanks to Peter Stobart from St Fin Barre's cathedral for working on an organ video.

Thanks to those who sourced and shared images and photos on request.

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The website has been a great resource for schools and its bookmarking on classroom laptops and the materials that I have added each month are supporting schools, particularly at different seasons of the Church Year, as well as providing ideas and resources for RE and Assemblies. Let me show you some examples [slides].

This is the tile cover for the 3rd class *Follow Me* book Log On (which will be available for September as a digital download. This slide shows the breadth and depth of the content for Log On and the curriculum strands are clearly marked. We will be supporting teachers with sample calendars for their planning. The set of slide decks is all teachers will need – teachers' introductory slides avoid the need for teachers' manuals. Each lesson is composed of between three and eight topics – a topic could be taught at one time or may be divided over two days. It depends on the teacher (this is also in line with the new curriculum philosophy of teacher agency).

Methodology: The methodology is simple and accessible to children of all stages of religious development. It is aimed to support the teacher through well-planned slides, teacher cues and background knowledge information. Discussion, creative activities, stories and prayer are part of each topic.

It is also worth noting that by teaching RE through the programme teachers are fulfilling the general key competencies required by the primary curriculum. It has a value as a subject in a busy school day.

Let me show you a little of what the new slides look like [slides].

To conclude, the redeveloped *Follow Me* programme is the Patron's Programme for our school network. It should be taught in each and every classroom under the time allocation in the new curriculum. It is integral to the ethos of our schools and is written as such in our school ethos statements and admission policies.

It fulfils the key competencies of the new primary curriculum framework.

It is inclusive, accessible to all teachers and pupils no matter how much or how little religious understanding or affiliation they have and through the eyes of myself as teacher educator and

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the teachers in the classrooms who created and piloted slides we can be confident the programme is pedagogically up to date.

Although I have the joy of coordinating this project this is the perfect location and context in which to launch the redevelopment of the *Follow Me* programme and to acknowledge the fact that the Church of Ireland community is working to create this programme for the children of our schools. Thank you to them and to those who will be involved in this exciting new project over the coming years.