



# WOODSTOCK SCHOOL RELIGIOUS LIFE GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

Adopted by the Board of Directors: March 2006

## Board Policy

Woodstock is a Christian school with a long tradition of openness in matters of spiritual life and religious practice. Today, the openness to which we aspire enables our students to reflect on, freely debate, understand and come to their own conclusions about matters of religious belief and spiritual practice, to develop their own moral and ethical values, as well as to leave school with a deep understanding of the beliefs and values of others. It is our belief that, in this way, we can model for our students an experience of life in which individuals from very different backgrounds, traditions and systems of belief can live together in peace, harmony and mutual endeavour, recognising their common humanity, their position of privilege and their responsibility for themselves, for one another and for the world. These attitudes and values are stated clearly in our mission statement and statement of beliefs and values.

From this flows an institutional position regarding religious life that is intentionally and positively welcoming, inclusive and supportive of the diversity of belief and practice within the student body, while also recognising a unique position for the Christian faith that is part of our historic and contemporary status as a 'minority institution' within India. Our intention is to maintain the essential Christian character of the school while also living with sincere respect for the diversity that is to be found within our community.

## Commentary and Definitions for Staff Guidelines

By 'inclusive' we mean the acknowledgement, honour, and welcome given to the range of cultures and traditions from which our students and staff come. This range of traditions brings a unique richness to Woodstock, offering valuable balance and a fresh perspective to the culture and tradition-bound 'blind spots' we all bring to such a community. Just over half of our students come from a Christian background. The other half represents a spectrum of belief from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, Jain and other backgrounds, including secular. Woodstock should be a place where students and staff from all of these faiths can truly belong without fear of disadvantage, unequal treatment, or misunderstanding. All are free to privately observe their respective religious traditions as long as this does not undermine the Christian ethos of the school.

By 'Christian' we mean the historically-held beliefs and practice of the Christian Church. Of necessity this must require a non-denominational stance which avoids an isolated position built on sectarian distinctives. We affirm the sacred texts of the Bible as the primary source of revelation for Christian faith and practice. Secondly we honour, as the majority of the Christian Church has done, the sacred tradition of the Church particularly the early ecumenical statements of belief as found in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Belief and practice cannot be separated from one another, and it is indeed dangerous to do so. A broad orthodoxy is, therefore, upheld in beliefs about God in the person and life of Christ even as emphasis is made of a 'flesh and blood' practice of his teachings both here in the Woodstock community and in our Indian context. We do not conduct baptisms nor exercise church discipline for the simple reason that Woodstock is a school and not a church or a mission society. As such, and with the recognition of the various belief systems represented in our midst, the school does not require personal adherence of any of its staff to a school credal statement.

While a plurality of worldviews is acknowledged at the school, Woodstock does not espouse other religious traditions, neither have we designed the Chaplaincy Programme to incorporate them in our spiritual life and practice. We do encourage all students and staff generally to develop and cultivate spiritual life and discipline, but to this end, the school does not endorse or offer as part of the programme practices rooted in religious traditions other than Christianity. This is not a statement of value concerning the practices of other religions, but is simply a matter of clarity in the theological position of the school. We are, however, committed to providing religiously-neutral 'sacred space' at

both the residence and school levels for the encouragement of meditation and prayer for all. In addition to this, the school accommodates students in observing off-campus public prayer and worship on the most important festival days, provided this does not unreasonably disrupt the regular school programme.

### **Freedoms and Responsibilities**

Whether they are actively involved in religious activities and programmes or not, all staff by their presence at Woodstock have agreed to support the mission and ethos of the school. This means, at the very least, that they will not undermine the religious life of the school, or promote disunity by their words, lifestyle, or behaviour. Positively, it means that all staff have the privilege and responsibility of developing and enriching the lives of students, each other, and those in the surrounding community. In this sense we are all in leadership positions and should strive to be a winsome expression of our various faiths and worldviews.

As role models for students, staff communicate with their whole lives. It is, therefore, incumbent upon staff members to maintain high standards in their public conduct, in professional and personal relationships, in marriage and family life, and in financial matters. In addition to this, by communicating respect and empathy to all, and by leading a lifestyle of generosity, service and simplicity rather than one of materialism and consumption, staff members become a life-giving message that both encourages and challenges. It is this incarnated holistic expression of faith that we promote, and not simply one that is preached with words.

While staff are free to make their own choices, it is expected that they will not make lifestyle choices that will undermine the Christian ethos of the school or our expectations of the students. Staff members must also be vigilant about how they speak to and about one another, especially in front of students, showing themselves to be people of integrity, kindness and charity. The goal is to model the kind of moral excellence that the school seeks to inculcate in the students rather than opening the community up to the charge of hypocrisy, even as grace and mercy is extended in bearing with one another's failures and shortcomings. In all of these matters it must be borne in mind that unity is built not on uniformity but on humility.

Woodstock also intentionally seeks to foster an environment where there is freedom of conscience for all in regards to religious belief and commitments. 'Freedom of conscience' means no one should feel coerced in matters of faith. Staff are reminded that they are not in a position of equality with students, and therefore are responsible for handling their position of authority with care. No attempts should be made to coerce, manipulate or otherwise induce anyone to make or change their religious commitments. Our goal is to educate. This includes a freedom to communicate matters of faith in open dialogue and discussion. Although this freedom for all in matters of faith and spiritual practice is to be safeguarded, it must be borne in mind that when a person of any religious background freely chooses to work in an educational institution with a 'Christian' and 'inclusive' ethos such as Woodstock's, this will necessarily curtail the public expression of certain religious practices. This applies equally to students whose parents have voluntarily enrolled them in Woodstock.

### **Leadership and Accountability**

Responsibility for the religious life and programmes is delegated to the Chaplain who is a member of the school administration and is one of four senior posts appointed by the Board of Directors. The Chaplain reports regularly to the Principal and to the Board of Directors. A Chaplaincy Council acts as an advisory and support committee to the Chaplain with respect to the Chaplaincy Programme and Voluntary Christian Activities. Overall responsibility for the maintenance of the Christian character of Woodstock lies with the Principal.

### **Caveat**

This statement of policy and the guidelines is to be read as a whole and no part should be taken out of context or read separately.

David Jeffery  
Principal

Brian Dunn  
Chaplain

Version 1.4 (March 21st, 2006)

## **Appendix: Religious Life and Programmes**

The Chaplaincy Programme works in conjunction with the Religious Education curriculum of the school. Both are central to the religious life at Woodstock, enabling the school to be faithful to its Christian tradition while at the same time encouraging students and staff to engage in respectful, intelligent dialogue with adherents and beliefs of other faiths. The Chaplaincy Programme is therefore intended to be openly yet sensitively Christian while the RE curriculum more clearly engages the plurality of faiths and worldviews in our midst.

- **Religious Education**

The Religious Education program is designed to equip students with a foundational knowledge of the broad variety of the world's religious and philosophical traditions. In Elementary and Middle School the curriculum is primarily Judeo-Christian in content with an emphasis on ethics and values. In High School, students receive an overview of the major world religions, as well as an entry-level understanding of related philosophical theories. Care is taken to represent each religious tradition fairly, relying on the sacred texts as primary sources as well as authoritative teachers and practitioners of the religion in their accurate interpretation. Thus, we endeavour to teach other religions on their own terms and not from a Christian perspective, to whatever degree that is possible. Students have opportunity to receive further spiritual formation and religious understanding through experiential learning, such as Activity Week trips, the environmental studies programme, hikes, voluntary service opportunities such as C.A.R.E. and other student led service initiatives. Staff are encouraged, once again, to lead by example in serving the community and modelling responsible stewardship of the environment. While we do not have a 'Christian' academic curriculum, teachers in all subjects have the opportunity and responsibility to promote the kind of values which we seek to espouse.

- **The Chaplaincy Programme**

The Chaplaincy Programme is designed to both introduce and communicate the Christian faith to students, as well as to encourage the discipleship and growth of those students who have expressed a Christian commitment. The required activities related to the Chaplaincy Programme are: the regular attendance of the students in Edgehill at Sunday School, the annual Elementary and Middle School retreats, a monthly chapel service for grades 6-12, and Christmas and Easter all-school chapel services. For the chapel services we attempt to draw from a variety of Christian traditions, both traditional and modern. In addition to these, students are required to attend assemblies which begin with a short devotional message. Staff are expected from time to time to lead these and content should be broadly Christian. There is scope in these for staff of other faiths to share from their own personal experience and belief provided, once again, that it does not undermine the Christian faith or ethos of the school. It is vitally important, even in such required activities, to maintain a non-coercive and primarily instructive tone and atmosphere.

- **Voluntary Christian Activities**

There are also a number of voluntary opportunities offered to both staff and students. Among these is a weekly residence-level service designed to be accessible and interactive for students. There are also weekly discipleship activities for each school level, Friendship Club for Elementary students, Quest for Middle School Students and Discipleship Group for High School students. There is one High School Retreat in each semester in which students receive instruction on living the Christian life in today's world. In addition to these, there are the weekly Friday Morning Bible Studies held in staff homes, as well as informal prayer meetings offered in the residences under the supervision of residence supervisors. Because all our chapel services are offered on Sunday afternoons or evenings, Christian staff and students are free to, and encouraged to attend local congregations. Throughout the week, there are a number of fellowship groups held on campus for staff, as well as those offered through local churches. Staff are reminded that involvement in the ministry of local congregations should only be undertaken with sensitivity to the culture and without compromising a primary commitment to working at Woodstock.