



WOODSTOCK SCHOOL POLICY MANUAL

BOARD POLICY: RELIGIOUS LIFE POLICY

OBJECTIVES

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.

PROCEDURES

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.



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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.



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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.

APPENDICES & REFERENCES

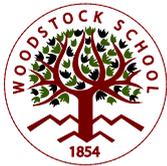
Appendix: Religious Life and Programmes

REVIEW & REVISION

Policy owner: Chaplain
Written by: Brian Dunn
Review by: School Council
Approval required: Board

POLICY UPDATES HISTORY:

Date	Reviewed by & Date of review	Approved by & Date of approval	Next review
March 2006	Principal – David Jeffery March 21, 2006	Board of Directors 2014	March 2019



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1.5.4.1 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 Early Years and Middle Years the curriculum is primarily Judeo-Christian in content with an emphasis on ethics and values. In Upper Years, students receive an overview of the major world religions, as well as an entry-level understanding of key Christian beliefs. 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 program, 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 annual Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 retreats, a monthly chapel service for grades 5-12, 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.



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• Voluntary Christian Activities

There are also a number of voluntary opportunities offered to both staff and students. Among the opportunities are regular residence-level service Bible Studies groups. There are also regular discipleship activities for each school level, Friendship Club for Early Year students, Zone 56 for Grades 5-6 Students, Bible Study for Grades 7-8 and Sunday Connections for Upper Years students. Additionally, there are PASSAGE programs that have both a spiritual and service learning component.

There is one Upper Years Retreat in each semester in which students receive instruction on living the Christian life in today's world. In addition to these, there are informal prayer meetings offered in the residences under the supervision of residence supervisors. All staff and students are free to, and encouraged to attend local Christian congregations, whether they are Christian or seeking a faith. The school supports Residential Students attending church in cooperation with the Residential Staff. 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.

• Guidelines for Sunday Activities

Staff at Woodstock have the privilege of nurturing and enriching the lives of students in their care through the personal relationships established and the communication of positive values that are spoken and modeled. The incarnation of values that both encourage and challenge students and staff to make wise choices in the use of their time is crucial to building healthy individuals and school communities.

One long – recognised aspect of this is the need for a rhythm of work and leisure. The Biblical principle of the 'Sabbath' points to the human need of rest and recreation

These guidelines have been developed to protect the well-being of both staff and students. In order to meet this need the following general principles are required guidelines for activities on Sunday.

- Sunday will be viewed primarily as a day of re-creation – a day which will be different from the other days of the week.
- Students will be able to visit a local church of their choice with transportation arranged in cooperation with Residential Staff.
- Students will stay in dorms to rest, complete homework and have down time.
- Students may assist in the tutorial program for the children of employees or attend the voluntary Christian fellowship group.
- Students may join hikes which cover a weekend or participate in special review sessions for exams that are organised by staff. Occasional CARE activities may be scheduled provided a student's involvement is only once a semester. These activities need to be approved in advance by the Dean of Student Life.
- Organized sports activities or practices should not take place on Sundays to encourage student rest.
- Sports teams should participate in off-campus competitions as an exception, instead of a regular basis, with the approval of the Dean of Student Life.
- The Gym will be closed on Sundays until 12:30 PM to facilitate staff and students attending church services and honoring the Christian roots of the school.