



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

*Pastoral Letter to be read in all the Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on the weekend of
8/9th September 2018, Education Sunday.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we keep 'Education Sunday', when the Church celebrates and promotes its work in education. In England, there are just over two thousand Catholic schools – primary, secondary, sixth form colleges and special schools – educating over 800,000 children and young people, which is 10% of the total school population. Here in Plymouth Diocese, there are 40 Catholic schools – including three joint Catholic and Church of England schools - educating almost 10,000 pupils. Most of the schools in our Diocese are part of Plymouth CAST, a Trust which is responsible for 35 schools and one nursery.

Plymouth CAST, as you may be aware, has received negative press in recent years due to some poor Ofsted inspections. There is now a new leadership team in place and a renewed determination from all school leaders and staff to provide the best possible education for our pupils. Catholic education is part of the mission of the Church "to preach the Gospel to all nations: to enrich all people with the light of the Good News, which, by its essence, is aimed at transforming the human person and setting him or her on the path that leads to salvation."
[1]

Many of the young people who come to our schools do not practice their faith regularly, and the Church recognises, too, that for many "Catholic schools are often the only places where young people encounter the bearers of Good News" [2]. In our increasingly secular and often troubled world, our Catholic schools present a vision of reality which is often at odds with the mainstream view. Inspired by the Gospel and the teaching of the Church, we introduce our pupils to a world which is made by a loving Father, a creation into which God was born in Jesus Christ to show us the way to the Father, a world which is continually guided by His Holy Spirit.

Catholic schools were once described as 'health centres of the spirit', places where young people can flourish spiritually and emotionally. Catholic schools are also places of learning and the Church has always been clear that it expects the highest standards of education. In Canon Law it states that the education which is given in Catholic schools should be "at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area." [3]

Why does the Church insist on high standards? Because we want our children and young people, inspired by the Gospel message of salvation, to leave our schools as 'agents of change' – committed to making the world more peaceful, just and compassionate. We want their minds and hearts to be "opened", just like the man who was cured in today's Gospel. We

want them to hear and understand the world around them and be able to give voice to a message of hope and salvation.

We want our pupils while they are in our schools to experience their dignity as children of God, to know that they are loved, that they are gifted, that they have a unique mission in the world and that they are meant to be with God forever. We want them to experience the love of God in the form of caring and wise teachers and support staff. We want them to encounter the divine especially in the liturgy of the Church.

This weekend in Liverpool we are celebrating *Adoremus* – the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage and Congress. I know that you will be having a Eucharistic Procession in the parish to unite with other Catholics across the country in adoring and praising Our Lord. At the heart of our faith is the Risen Christ, whom we meet most especially in the Celebration of the Eucharist and in the Blessed Sacrament. It is a great gift to our young people – Catholic or not – to invite them into an encounter with the Real Presence of the living God.

We need your help for this vital work, and for our ministry in education. Please support the work of the Church in education through your prayers and in your donations to the second collection which takes place today. Please also consider how you might become more involved in our schools, perhaps as a Governor? Our local governing boards and governing bodies act as champions and advocates for our schools and build bridges between the school and the local parish. If you are a teacher or support staff worker in a school, would you consider applying for a job in a Catholic school? If you are a parent, does your child attend a Catholic school? If not, why not find out more about your local Catholic school?

Please pray for all the schools in our Diocese - for the pupils, staff and governors - and do please give some thought to how you might help them in their work. Parents, thank you most especially for all that you are trying to do to pass on the faith to your children. May the Lord richly bless all our efforts.

Pray for me.

Yours devotedly



Rt Rev Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth

[1] Cardinal Grocholewski, *The Catholic School According to the Code of Canon Law* (Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, Vol.10, Issue 2)

[2] *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014)

[3] Code of Canon Law, 806.2

If you would like to know more about how you might support the schools in Plymouth CAST, please contact raymond.friel@plymouthcast.org.uk.