

Foreward to Education Sunday - Guidance for Schools and Parishes

Education Sunday is one of the oldest Days of Special Prayer in this country's liturgical calendar. Established by the Bishops in 1848, originally on the feast of the Sacred Heart in June, and now celebrated at the beginning of the academic year. Although long associated with the annual collection for the work of the Catholic Education Service, its main purpose is to celebrate the work of Catholic education and to enable it to continue to flourish with the support of the whole Catholic community.

Catholic education is a precious legacy from our forebears, and a testament to their courage and foresight. In the mid-nineteenth century the Catholic Church in this country was a mainly poor and immigrant community, emerging from centuries of persecution. Education was rightly seen as the principal means of handing on the faith and improving the spiritual, moral, social and cultural lives of the next generation. The Bishops made the education of the poor their top priority and, making huge sacrifices, Catholics set about raising funds and fighting for the right to re-establish a national network of schools and universities which we enjoy today.

Catholic education is a tremendous achievement to be celebrated. The Catholic Church is this country's largest provider of secondary schools and second-largest provider of primary schools. Catholic education is by far the largest charitable endeavour of the Church in this country: we give thanks for the many thousands of teachers, lecturers, academics, support staff, leaders, governors, advisers and others who have found their vocation in Catholic education, and without whom this endeavour would be impossible. Catholic schools continue to be true to their mission: they are more diverse than any other type of school, they recruit disproportionately more children from the poorest areas of the country and still consistently manage to be the highest performing schools in the country.

For Catholic education to continue to flourish, it needs to rely on the continued support of the whole Catholic community. As in previous generation, all Catholics need to be prepared to do their bit to support, promote and defend Catholic education. There are many ways to do this: whether by praying for vocations to Catholic education, responding to consultations or letting your elected representatives know your views, or encouraging a young person to teach in a Catholic school. In that way, we can all ensure together that our Catholic schools and universities will be there to form the next generation.

Paul Barber
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