

Centred on Christ

OCTOBER 2020



Our Lady of Paisley;
pray for us

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Dear Colleague,

As we prepare to celebrate **Catholic Education Week** in November, this edition reflects on its theme of **Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life**. It contains:

- An article on the nature of Jesus by Father John Morrison;
- A Reflection for a Staff Meeting;
- Self-evaluation on some of the 'big' questions on how we, as Communities of Faith and Learning, promote pupils' understanding of Jesus as The Way, the Truth and the Life.

At the World Youth Day in Krakow (2016), Pope Francis asked young people to renew their friendship with Christ. Hopefully, this Catholic Education Week will help us all to reflect on how we enable them to deepen that friendship. In his uplifting homily, Pope Francis reminded them that:

"Jesus can give you true passion for life. Jesus can inspire us not to settle for less, but to give the very best of ourselves. Jesus challenges us, spurs us on and helps us to keep trying when we are tempted to give up. Jesus pushes us to keep our sights high and to dream of great things."

Is Christ at the centre of the lived experience of the young people in our schools, inspiring, challenging, spurring them - and us - on? How far do we provide significant opportunities for them to grow in his friendship; to see Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life?

We would be grateful if you would let us know how you are marking Catholic Education Week. Anne Marie will be happy to re-tweet your events on **@DoPEducation1**. If you have permission from parents, we would be delighted to receive information and photographs of your celebrations so that we can share good practice and to grow as a Diocesan family.

We have also included a number of resources to help in your preparations for **Advent**. For staff, there is an article by Father Jonathan Whitworth on the key messages of Advent and a short reflection for a staff meeting by Deacon Joe McGill. We have also included links to Advent classroom resources by our partner agencies: ACN, Missio, SCIAF, and SCES.

As part of our Strategic Plan, we hope to enhance the **role of parents as the 'first educators'** of their children in the ways of faith. *'Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action'* seeks to reflect on why we strive to engage parents generally in their children's education but more specifically outlines the Church's expectations of both schools and parents in working together to foster a love of Christ in young people.

Please do not hesitate to contact Anne Marie, Stephen or me if we can be of assistance to you.

Best wishes,

Neil Roarty

Neil Roarty
Director of Schools



Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, not somewhere in-between

Fr John Morrison

I made a promise to myself several years ago that I would never get involved in an argument on social media regarding religion. I was not afraid of discussing religion or elucidating some aspect of our faith but I did fear being sucked into a sort of spiritual 'black hole' which would sap my energy, time and patience.

In my admittedly limited experience of online spats regarding religion - they rarely lead anywhere meaningful - keyboard warriors and trolls will not be drawn to faith because of something I say on Facebook or Twitter. That said, what is intriguing are the kind of areas on which such arguments tend to focus. The kind of things that confused people in the first centuries of the Christian era confuse them even now.

Take for example the figure of Jesus Christ. Some early Christians at times struggled to fully articulate what they believed about Him. Some over-emphasized his humanity, others his divinity. Still others were confused about how he related to God the Father and the enigmatic Holy Spirit. Were they different and distinct? Or were they simply ways of saying the same thing or pointing towards the same mystery? The first five hundred years of the Christian story were, in many ways, spent resolving these kinds of issues.

As the contemporary philosopher Hegel lamented, however: we learn from history that we do not learn from history. Like some pernicious virus, ancient misunderstandings of

Jesus refuse to go away and regularly pop up on social media.

Take for example the teachings of Arius. Arius was an Egyptian priest who lived in the fourth century. He taught that Jesus was God in a certain way but not in a full sense. When compared to God the Father, Jesus had a kind of 'Pound Shop' Divinity. According to Arius, God the Father made Jesus at some point in time and this made Him a sort of lesser divinity. In the ancient world, where no son could be truly greater than his father, this idea made perfect sense and quickly gained popularity.

The matter was not fully resolved until the First Council of Nicea which powerfully reiterated the Church's understanding that Jesus was equal to God the Father in all things and had always existed. That was the matter settled..... or was it?

Even today many Christians continue to characterise Jesus as simply another prophet or great teacher or moral exemplar or, to quote a noted 'YouTuber', another moment in 'the flow of divine consciousness'. Writing almost fifty years ago Karl Rahner, the famous Jesuit theologian, lamented that even most practising Catholics are 'virtual Arians' who do not fully grasp the truth that Jesus is fully divine. We might concur, that in our time there are certainly plenty of 'Arians' in virtual reality!

If Arius saw Jesus as human – all too human – there were others, in the ancient world, who

Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, not somewhere in-between

Fr John Morrison

(Continued from page 2)

refused to recognise, to any degree, the quintessentially 'human' dimension of his existence.

In their general understanding, being 'human' was a rather dreadful curse which necessitated living in rather unreliable bodies, being prone to all sorts of desires and impulses and being confined by categories of space and time. As such, no self-respecting God would become human. This meant that Jesus was simply some sort of friendly ghost. He was never hungry or thirsty, He never slept or woke, He never cried or smiled – He simply appeared to have these needs. What is more, He never died on a Cross and did not really rise from the dead. It was all an illusion, a charade for His human followers.

Successive Church Councils succeeded in eradicating this false and ultimately unhelpful understanding of Jesus from mainstream Christianity but it continues to persist in all sorts of contemporary spiritualities, as a wander through YouTube or Twitter will readily show.

The genius of the Christian faith is that it proposes in Jesus a God who is fully human and divine, a God who is both giver and gift, messenger and message, yesterday and today, beginning and end. This vision of God is always more intriguing, alluring and relevant than the countless pallid images of Jesus we encounter on social media or in the musings of 'common sense'.

Jesus, not just another great teacher or prophet or even a friendly ghost, but God in the full sense and human in every sense.

For Reflection:

Which terms, concepts and expressions best express the truly Christian understanding of just who Jesus is?

Honouring Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life – Reflection for Teachers

Head Teachers may wish to use this
short reflection on the theme
'Honouring Jesus Christ as the Way,
the Truth and the Life'.

In the name of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

Gathered together, we pray
that our school community
will reflect on the words of
Pope Benedict XV1.

*"First and foremost every
Catholic educational
institution is a place to
encounter the living God
who in Jesus Christ reveals
his transforming love and
truth."*

*Pope Benedict XVI –
Address to Catholic
Educators, April 2008*

Honouring Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life

Lord, we ask you to give us
your strength as we work
together as a school
community, to accompany
each other on our journey
of faith and learning. Help
us to create an inclusive
community in which every
person, made in the image
of God, is treated with
dignity and respect. We
pray that we will be positive
role models to our young
people, striving to enable
them to aspire to be the
best they can be and to use
their unique God given
talents to enhance their
future lives and the lives of
others, influenced by the
values of Jesus Christ.



A reading from the Gospel according to John (14: 6-20)

Jesus said: I am the Way; I am
Truth and Life. No one can come
to the Father except through me.
If you know me, you will know my
Father too. From this moment
you know Him and have seen
him.

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the
Father and then we shall be
satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have
I been with you all this time,
Philip, and you still do not know
me? Anyone who has seen me
has seen the Father, so how can
you say, "Show us the Father?"'

Do you not believe that I am in
the Father and the Father is in
me? What I say to you I do not
speak of my own accord: it is the
Father, living in me, who is doing
his works. You must believe me
when I say that I am in the Father
and the Father is in me; or at
least believe it on the evidence of
these works.

In all truth I tell you, whoever
believes in me will perform the

Honouring Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life – Reflection for Teachers

(Continued from page 4)

same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you.'

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, may our school chaplains, guide us as we work together to create a Gospel value based community of faith and learning. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Lord, help us ensure that our young people and their families feel included and supported in our school communities. We pray that they will feel that your love and compassion is with them particularly in difficult times they may face. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Lord, we pray that all those who lead our Catholic schools will be people of integrity so that they can be witnesses as well as teachers. We pray that the schools they lead will become places where our young people can experience your love in their lives. Let us pray that they will be inspired to embrace your call to lead and serve in faith. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Lord, we pray for all staff in our school communities, who give their talents to educating our young people. We pray that they will continue to work tirelessly to develop an ever deeper appreciation of the sacred duty to which you have called them. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Lord, we pray that with your help, we will foster a school community that is committed to promoting Catholic Social Teaching, seeking justice and opportunities for all. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Lord, we pray that our Catholic schools may be places where the fruits of the Spirit will flourish and grow. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Closing Prayer

Lord, you have called us to build communities of teaching and learning in the gift of your Spirit. Help us to continue in our pursuit of excellence to provide the highest quality of education that we can. May the fruits of the Spirit always be present in our efforts to pass on the Good News in our Catholic schools. We make this prayer to you through Christ, our Lord. Amen

Developing in Faith

Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life – Self-Evaluation



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Lord, we thank You for the
marvellous call
to educate in the light of the
Catholic faith.
Illumine our hearts and minds
with the wisdom of Your Spirit,
that our work today might
help Catholic educators
spread the truth of Your Son's
Gospel in all that they do.
Our Teacher and Lord.
Amen

"Jesus Christ is true God and
true man, in the unity of his
divine person; for this reason
he is the one and only mediator
between God and man."
*Catechism of the Catholic
Church (480)*

Developing in Faith helps to reflect upon this theme as part of the appendices which were published by SCES in 2019. They enable us to interrogate the two characteristics associated with this theme:

- A commitment to search for the wisdom in life and the pursuit of excellence, through the development of each person's unique God-given talents;
- A commitment to uphold the moral teaching, faith tradition and sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

As well as examining the features of effective practice listed in *Developing in Faith*, it may be worthwhile to consider some of the 'big' questions regarding Jesus' teaching in St John's Gospel (14: 1-12).

- How effective are we as a school in enabling young people to appreciate the full weight of Jesus' bold and dramatic teaching that:
 - He is **the** Way, not **a** way?
 - He is **the** Truth, not **some** of the truth?
 - He is **the** Life – that He has come so 'that (we) might have life, life to the full'. (John 10:10)
- Is Christ central to the life of our community – or is he 'fitted in'?
- Based upon this Gospel passage, early Christians described themselves as followers of 'The Way'. As a school community, do we consistently seek to follow Jesus as The Way to fullness of life, to eternal life, to the Father?
- Within our school community, does our life of prayer, liturgy and the Sacraments, celebrated regularly and reverently, enable young people to experience Christ's life in them? How do we enable them to allow Jesus to live in them? (St Paul, Gal 2:20)
- How do we help them to deepen their relationship with Him?
- How do we help young people to know the comfort and reassurance of Christ's words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled"; to let go of their worries and trust in Him?
- Pope Benedict XVI warned about the dangers of relativism. While we show respect to other religions, are we open in proclaiming Jesus' teaching that "No one can come to the Father except through me."?
- In the words of the 86th Psalm – "Teach me thy way, O Lord, and I will walk in thy truth." How confidently and faithfully do we teach the truth of the Catholic faith?
- At the end of the Gospel passage, Jesus states: "I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself; he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12) In our school community, what great works flow from our deepening friendship with Christ?

Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

As part of our Strategic Plan, we are seeking to strengthen communication between the Diocese and each Parent Council. A Diocesan Parent Forum will be established which will meet to discuss issues central to Catholic Education and the Diocese's plans for supporting schools, parents and chaplains in providing strong outcomes for children and young people in their moral and spiritual development. The Forum will also enhance communication between Parent Councils and the Church Representatives on each Local Authority.

This may be an opportune time, therefore, to reflect upon why partnership with parents is important in general and also why it is critical in the faith journeys of young people.

Parental Involvement – A Legal Requirement

Scottish schools are legally required to engage pro-actively with parents, with the 2006 Act building upon much good existing practice in Scottish schools.

Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

All schools have duties under this Act to help parents to be:

- involved with their children's education and learning
- welcomed as an active participant
- encouraged to express their views on education.

The National Action Plan

In addition to the legal requirement, the Scottish Government's National Action Plan 'Learning Together' (2018 – 2021) sets out its expectations on parental engagement including *"parental representation in decision-making, collaboration between parents and educators in matters such as school improvement planning and communication ... It is about ... opportunities for parents and families to get involved in activities in school or early learning and childcare setting.... This next phase of the plan will shift the emphasis from 'involving' to 'collaborating with' parents and families."* Parents and Parent Councils will be encouraged to collaborate with the school improvement agenda from the very beginning.

Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education

<p>“Parents, carers and families are by far the most important influences in a child's life. Their support can play a vital role at all stages of education.” (Education Scotland)</p> <p>The National Improvement Framework recognises parental involvement as a key driver in achieving excellence and equity, “helping to raise attainment for all and helping to ensure every child has an equal chance of success”.</p> <p>Research across the world consistently shows the tangible benefits of parental involvement in their children's education. The following are the conclusions of research commissioned by the Department of Education and Science in England, 2001.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental involvement in a child's schooling between the ages of 7 and 16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education.• Parental involvement has a significant effect on pupil achievement throughout the years of schooling. It contributes to no less than 10% of variation in achievement.• The involvement of parents in secondary education has an effect on continued development.• In particular, a father's interest in a child's schooling is strongly linked to educational outcomes for the child.
<p>In 2000, OFSTED also published its findings on the benefits for children of parental involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• improved standards in numeracy and literacy• positive behavioural and attitudinal changes• enhanced confidence and self-esteem

The Challenges of Engaging Parents

<p>Many parents find it difficult to be active partners in their children's education. In 2001, DfES summarised its research findings on the problems faced by parents in engaging with schools.</p>	<p>What are the challenges to parents becoming involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competing demands in their lives such as work commitments, demands of other children, childcare difficulties and lack of time generally.• Parents' difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy skills.• Parents who themselves didn't enjoy school, or had a bad experience at school, may have difficulties communicating with teachers.
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Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

Partnership in Faith – The Role of Parents

If research shows that the involvement of parents in their children's education has a significant and positive impact, experience also tells us that this is even more important in the faith journeys of young people. It is for this reason that the Church has consistently emphasised the fundamental role of parents in their children's upbringing.

Parents *"must be recognised as the primary and principal educators"*.

Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education, 1965 (3)

The family is the *"first and fundamental school of social living"*.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 (34)

"Schools do not replace parents, but complement them."

Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, 2015

Encouraging Parental Involvement

The Church has also stated that schools have a responsibility to be pro-active in reaching out to parents.

"....there is a special duty of schools to accept willingly and even to encourage opportunities for contact with the parents of students."

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 (34)

"... moreover, teachers in fulfilling their duty are to collaborate very closely with parents, who are to be heard willingly and for whom associations or meetings are to be established and highly esteemed."

Canon 792 §2

"Achieving the educational aims of the school should be an equal priority for teachers, students and families alike, each one according to his or her own role, always in the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. Therefore channels of communication should be open among all those concerned with the school."

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988 (39)

Duties of Parents

While setting out the duty of schools to engage with parents, the Church also clearly states the responsibilities of parents in their children's education.

"Parents must cooperate closely with the teachers of the schools to which they entrust their children to be educated."

Canon 792 §2

"Among the means to foster education, the Christian faithful are to hold schools in esteem; schools are the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education."

Canon 796 §1

"Not only are the attitudes of teachers crucial for the success of Catholic education but also the attitudes of Catholic parents.... They must also see to it that their own homes are places in which these values are first fostered and lived. Parents' own practice of the faith, their own love for Christ, is of course fundamental."

Pope Saint John Paul II to the Bishops of Chicago, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee, May 1998, (4)

Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

The Diocese of Paisley

In November 2015, Bishop John convoked the Diocesan Synod on *‘The New Evangelisation and The Role of the Laity’*. In the Acts of the Synod (May 2017), there are clear links to importance of families in the formation of their children.

4.5 Families

4.5.1.2 Evangelisation in the Family: Parents are the Evangelisers in the family, the first and primary educators of their children in the ways of faith. In particular, we will seek to support families with instruction and materials which encourage them to establish family prayer and faith discussion as a normal routine of family life.

4.5.1.3 Sacramental preparation: Marriage and baptismal preparation, preparation of the first sacraments and RCIA provide families, children and adults with an open door to the Church and the Church to them. Here are good opportunities to engage those who have a tenuous relationship with the Church. We will seek to discern how these brief connections can be used to proclaim the gospel of mercy and peace.

4.6 Youth and schools

4.6.1.2 Family, School and Parish links: The faith communities of family, school and parish provide a potent force when they work in unison to form and support children in their faith journeys. We will endeavour to do more to integrate this triangular support structure, placing parents and families at the centre of efforts to help children become mature Christian disciples.

Challenges

The ideal of the home-school-parish triangle is a great force for good in the lives of significant numbers of our pupils. However, for many children and young people this is far removed for their experience, where their families have a superficial or no connection with the local parish. Pope Francis on more than one occasion has expressed concern about the lack of guidance and correction in some families and a *“lack of mutual enforcement between teachers and parents”*. (Pope Francis, 5 January 2018, Italian Association of Catholic Teachers).

How, then, do we build this partnership? How can we, for example, direct the work of Chaplaincy in our Primary and Secondary schools to reach out to families and encourage their involvement in the religious and spiritual development of their children?

Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

Reflection on Parental Involvement – From Ideal to Action

There is already a significant body of good practice in primary and secondary schools across the Diocese, as evidenced by strong references in HMI Reports. It may be, however, beneficial to reflect on the following questions.

Ethos

- Is our ethos one of mutual respect?
- Is the tone of all our communications one of welcome and encouragement to parents?

Information about the School

- At times of transitions, do we share our Vision, Values and Aims and show how they are based upon the mission of Catholic education – the formation of the human person - and the values of the Gospel?
- Do we share easily accessible information on Religious Education and Education for Relationships?
- Do we emphasise that our charity work is based upon serving God in our neighbour?
- Do we explain that our work on Sustainability and Eco Schools is rooted in care for God's Creation?
- Do we underline that our anti-bullying and inclusion policies are based on the Gospel values of respect, dignity, fairness and compassion?
- Do we include information about developments in the faith life of the school and enhanced outcomes in the pupils' spiritual development in our Standard and Quality report?
- Is our communication with parents regular and timely? Are we creative in using social media and our website as well as leaflets, newsletters and the school bag?

Encouraging their participation in the life of the school

- Do we encourage parents to participate in Masses and other liturgies?
- Do we invite them to attend celebrations of pupils' achievements e.g. in living out Christian values, actively supporting Faith in Action activities, enrolling in the Pope Francis Faith Award and the Caritas Award?
- Do we welcome them to social events?
- Do we encourage them to attend the Annual Parent Forum and participate in the Parent Council, PTA and Working Groups?

Supporting their children's learning at home

- How well do we share suggestions as to how they can support their children's education in faith at home?
- Within Religious Education, do we suggest topics they can discuss with their children?
- Do we provide enough information about *God's Loving Plan* and *Called to Love* to enable them to contribute to their children's learning in Relationships Education?
- Do we give examples of how they can contribute to their children's spiritual development by sharing prayers in line with the liturgical and devotional calendars?
- How well do we work in partnership with the parish to engage parents in Sacramental preparation programmes?

Partnership with Parents – From Ideal to Action

Reflection on Parental Involvement – From Ideal to Action continued

Information about children's progress and achievements

- How helpful are our Religious Education reports and discussions at Parents' Meetings in informing parents on their children's progress, including their personal qualities?
- Do our reports and profiles successfully capture children and young people's wider achievement e.g. their work in the Pope Francis Faith Award and Caritas; and their involvement or leadership in Faith in Action programmes e.g. ACN, Missio, Mary's Meals, SCIAF, SPUC and SSVP.

Listening to Parents

- How well do we reinforce the fact that they are valued partners by listening to their views?
- Do we welcome parents' views on their child's learning at parents' meetings/individual meetings to plan support for their learning?
- How regularly do we issue parental surveys and how far do we make it easy for them to submit them? Do these surveys ask for feedback on the school's life of faith?
- Do we invite parents to participate in focus groups (perhaps along with Parish Council representatives) on aspects of the faith life of the school?
- Do we act on the concerns and suggestions which arise from surveys and Focus Groups?
- How far do we enable members of the Parent Council to analyse the results of parental questionnaires and involve them in planning how to take forward the main issues arising from them?

Self-Evaluation

In addition to the above table, the Diocesan Education Department will share with schools a self-evaluation tool on parental partnership which is a blend of HGIOS and *Developing in Faith*. Schools may wish to use this tool when having a specific focus on parental involvement or to use some aspects as they evaluate particular Quality Indicators.

The Department will also offer schools a Parental Survey which they may wish to use in whole or in part e.g. schools may wish to include some of the questions in a general parental survey. We appreciate how difficult it can be to ensure that parents return questionnaires, given their busy lives. Online surveys increase participation levels but can exclude families who cannot afford internet access. Paper questionnaires often get lost in the depths of school bags. Surveys issued at parents' meetings and collected as parents leave is another model. Nothing is perfect – but it is important to show parents that they and their feedback are valued.

Advent - Father Jonathan Whitworth

When I was little I was afraid of the dark. It was not uncommon for me to waken during the night and reach for the nearest light-switch to banish the darkness. But at some point, a shift took place that dispelled my fear; it no doubt had everything to do with my growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Now, I prefer to pray in the dark.

We are fortunate in St John's to have an oratory in the parish house. I love beginning my mornings by praying there in the darkness before Jesus exposed in the monstrance with nothing to illuminate the room other than two altar candles and the sanctuary candle. At first, when I sit down, my eyes take a while to adjust to the darkness; I have to strain to see Jesus in the monstrance, and on the crucifix above the altar. But as my eyes adapt, Jesus steadily begins to emerge out of the darkness and becomes more visible.

I suspect we can all relate to this experience of gradually improving vision when we are in a dark environment. The eyes adjust automatically; it's not something we do as much as something we wait for. Our spiritual vision, however, is a bit different. It's something we must cultivate deliberately. Herein we discover the very heart and meaning of Advent.

Advent is a sacred time of preparation, overflowing with special graces, in which, we strive, with renewed purpose and intention, to sharpen our focus upon that which matters most: the one who is on the horizon, our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ.

Just as in the oratory, we begin our Advent journey in relative darkness, liturgically speaking, as we strain our eyes to see the saviour who is born for us, by lighting one solitary violet Advent candle on our wreaths, which, along with the readings at Mass, radiates just enough light to perceive something of the truth and identity of this saviour of ours. But not enough to grasp him fully; this is the work of Advent; to focus our spiritual gaze upon Him, through the darkness, and in doing so structure our whole lives around Him with increasing devotion as the weeks make procession towards Christmas morning when we shall look upon Him fully.

This year, perhaps more so than any in living memory, the darkness that we must all strain our eyes to see through to perceive Christ, is all around us. We live in a world where darkness seems to be gaining the upper hand in every aspect of human

life, from a global pandemic to civil unrest and all things in between, and it oftentimes appears as though the darkness has overwhelmed our world, and therefore us.

Advent is the Lord's response; it is the great season of hope-filled expectation. With each passing week comes a brighter wreath, boldly proclaiming that the Lord is not only on His way to us anew this year, but is already here and stands with us in the darkness of our present-day and illuminates our path forward, 'through Him, with Him and in Him' during our earthly lives, guiding us each step of the way, leading onto eternity with Him in heaven in the next. Advent, therefore, is the season in which we get to choose what to look at; the darkness or the light; all that which is not the Christ, and therefore must pass away, or that which remains eternally, the Christ and His heavenly kingdom.

How do we train our spiritual eyes to focus on Jesus? Through Eucharistic Adoration; spending consistent time with Jesus in His Eucharistic presence, in the Tabernacle or the monstrance. In adoration we allow Jesus to reveal himself to us in the midst of darkness.

By shifting our focus then from the stuff of our lives to our saviour, we awaken from our societal sleep and lift up our eyes, training them to focus on Jesus so that no matter how dark the world around us becomes, His light will show us His ways, and His paths, which lead us through the darkness to His sacred heart.

Jesus warns us in 'you must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come'. The way to prepare for that hour we do not expect is to prepare the hour we do expect. The hour we plan, the hour we commit to.

If we want our lives to be different, if we want to cultivate an interior peace that no darkness can overcome then you and I must decide to make this Advent different from all previous Advents. We must train our eyes to look regularly and steadily at Jesus in His eucharistic body so that we will recognize Him in the other circumstances of our lives. Then we need never fear the darkness of this world because the light of Christ has, and always will, overcome it.

An Advent Reflection for Teachers

Rev Joe McGill

Head Teachers may wish to use this short reflection with staff during Advent.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, we ask you to transform our hearts this Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son. Help us to make our school community a place where your Son is welcomed. We ask that you help us to make the roads to your Son straight that our pupils may find Him who gives everlasting life, and who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen.

A Reading from the Prophet Isaiah (40: 3-5; 9)

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low. Let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges a valley; then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Go up on a high mountain, joyful messenger to Zion. Shout with a loud voice, joyful messenger to Jerusalem. Shout without fear, say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God.'

Prayers of Intercession

Lord God, as we prepare to celebrate your Son's coming at Christmas, we ask that you enlighten our faith, and give us the joy of Christ's incarnation.

Lord God, we ask you: **Hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we pray for the courage to be joyful messengers to the pupils, and we ask that we would not be afraid to share our love of the Lord with a loud voice.

Lord God, we ask you: **Hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we ask that that you guide us and help us to keep our school community a place where you are easily seen.

Lord God, we ask you: **Hear our prayer.**

Lord God, as we approach the holidays, we ask that you bless our time off with family and friends and keep us safe to return in the new year.

Lord God, we ask you: **Hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for sending Your Son to be one of us. We ask that you would be with us as we teach and lead. Help us in this Advent season to love you and to make you loved in our School, and we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Advent Resources and Events

Every school will be planning lessons and liturgies for the Season of Advent, helping young people to draw closer to God. The information below may help you put together your programme.

Diocesan Youth Events

Please encourage families to support the Primary Advent Day (P4-P7 pupils) on Sunday 29 November (2-6pm) in St John's, Barrhead. Earlier, the Primary Reflection on 25 October will focus on saying 'Yes' to God. The theme of the S1-S2 and S3-S6 Reflections on 8 and 15 November will be discipleship. If they are cancelled due to Covid, Father John Morrison will send materials to schools.

Aid to the Church in Need

ACN has produced Advent prayers and readings suitable for both primary and secondary schools. The Advent Candle Activity can be used to countdown to Christmas, encouraging students to record their prayers and preparations during Advent: <https://acnuk.org/resource/advent-prayers-and-readings/>

The Christmas Tree That Came Home reminds us that wherever we are, home is in our hearts. In 1940, Marta Salamonowicz's father was deported to Siberia as a fifteen-year-old boy together with his family and thousands of other displaced Poles. The story was written to remember children from those times to this very day in Syria, Iraq that continue to suffer the loss of their homeland. <https://acnuk.org/resource/advent-the-christmas-tree-that-came-home/>

ACN will add to their Advent Resources: <https://acnuk.org/resources-landing/>

Missio Scotland

Missio has produced various Advent resources for Primary Schools:

[Star of Hope](#); [Peace Paperchain](#); [Joyful Angels](#); [A Gift for the World](#); [The Nativity](#)

We would also encourage your pupils to submit entries for the art competition. Previous winners have come from Paisley Diocese: [Christmas Artwork Competition 2020 Entry Form](#)

SCIAF

SCIAF is providing an **Advent Reflection Calendar** that you can use each day. It is a PowerPoint presentation with hyperlinks on each Advent 'door' that click through to a daily reflection. As their Advent appeal highlights the necessity of water, each prayer, piece of Scripture or reflection will relate to water. It's a great way to start the day and add a global perspective.

SCIAF's **Real Gift Christmas campaign** will focus on the gift of a water filter. £37 can buy a water filter that removes 99.99% of bacteria and viruses meaning clean, safe drinking water and happy and healthy kids! The filter is guaranteed for 20 years and can filter over 700,000 litres of water. The presentation will share stories from people who have received some of the different gifts that are given to families to help themselves out of poverty.

Click on www.sciaf.org.uk/schools-advent-resources to download resources.

SCES

Advent lessons for Primary and Secondary pupils can be accessed by going to the "Religious Education" dropdown menu and selecting "Covid 19: RE & Spiritual Support".

Staff Reflection

As well as the Reflection for a Staff Meeting on Page 14, Primary and Secondary Head Teachers are invited to an Advent Reflection Service, led By Fr Michael, in St Conval's Church on 9 December at 4.15pm. It will be an opportunity to experience a time of peace and calm with colleagues in preparation for Christmas.

"Advent is the time we are given to welcome the Lord who comes to encounter us, and also to verify our longing for God, to look forward and prepare ourselves for Christ's return."

Pope Francis

"It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope."

Pope Benedict XVI

A Fruitful Advent

Devote yourself to prayer.

Work for peace in your heart and in the world.

Recognize the dignity of all human persons.

Look to Mary's example of faithful obedience.

Open your heart to an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Pope St. John Paul II

Diocesan Contacts

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Diocesan Education Calendar: 2020-21

Month	Date	Day	Time	Event	Location	Target Group
OCT	25	Sun	2-6pm	Primary School Reflection	St Fergus, Paisley	P4-P7
OCT	27	Tue	10-2.15pm	Caritas Conference	Cathedral Hall	Caritas Candidates
NOV	8	Sun	2-6pm	S1-S2 Reflection	St Mirin's Chaplaincy	S1-S2
NOV	15	Sun	2-6pm	S3-S6 Reflection	St Mirin's Chaplaincy	S3-S6
NOV	16-30			Catholic Education Week	Schools and parishes	All schools
NOV	25	Wed		Red Wednesday (ACN)	School-based events	All schools
NOV	29	Sun	2-6pm	Primary Advent Day	St John's, Barrhead	P4-P7
DEC	9	Wed	4.15pm	Advent Reflection Service	St Conval's, Linwood	Primary and Secondary HTs
FEB	17	Wed		Ash Wednesday	School-based	All schools
FEB	24	Wed	4.15pm	Lenten Reflection Service	St Conval's, Linwood	Primary and Secondary HTs
FEB	28	Sun	2-6pm	S1-S2 Lenten Reflection	St Mirin's Chaplaincy	S1-S2
MAR	3	Wed	7pm	Lenten Stations Masses (High Schools, partner Primary Schools and local parishes) Secondary Schools are asked to lead music; and Primary Schools to lead the Prayers of the Faithful and Offertory Procession.	St Joseph's, Greenock	St Columba's Cluster
MAR	4	Thu			St Laurence's, Greenock	Notre Dame Cluster
MAR	10	Wed			Holy Family, Port Glasgow	St Stephen's Cluster
MAR	11	Thu			St James', Renfrew ¹	Trinity Cluster
MAR	17	Wed			St Fergus', Paisley	St Andrew's Cluster
MAR	18	Thu			St John's, Barrhead	St Luke's Cluster
MAR	24	Wed			St Joseph's, Clarkston	St Ninians's Cluster
MAR	25	Thu			St Aidan's, Johnstone	St Benedict's Cluster
MAR	14	Sun	2-6pm	Primary Lent Day	St Laurence's, Greenock	P4-P7
MAR	28	Sun	2-6pm	World Youth Day	St Mirin's Cathedral	S3-S6
MAY	10-14			ACN Rosary for Peace	School-based	P1-P7
MAY	13	Thu		Ascension Day	School-based	P1-S6
MAY	23	Sun	2-6pm	Primary Pentecost Day	St Fergus, Paisley	P4-P7
JUN	8	Tue	9.45-3pm	Teaching in Catholic Schools Conference	Cathedral Halls	S6
JUN	9	Wed	4.30pm	Thanksgiving Mass	St Mirin's Cathedral	Primary & Secondary NQTs, their Mentors and HTs

¹ Change of venue (from St Bernadette's).

NB: The Feast of All Saints fall on a Sunday this year.