Joy - St Mary’s celebrate an immense achievement after winning the Sigerson Cup for only the second time in its history
Mission Statement

- To seek to articulate the vision of Catholic education.
- To identify, explore and promote ways in which this vision can be lived in Catholic schools.
- To empower teachers with a renewed and revitalised sense of the vocational nature of teaching.
- To aid student and recently qualified teachers to understand and embrace the fundamental spirituality of their lived work and mission.
- To help promote the school as an integral and intrinsic part of the Church and wider community.
- To celebrate and share the lived experiences in schools as realisations and practical expressions of the Gospel values of justice, service, understanding and outreach.

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Cover image courtesy of: Gerd Curley, The Irish News
'The Homes of Donegal'

The ballad, 'The Homes of Donegal,' was made famous by the Strabane-born singer, Paul Brady. The lyrics were penned by Seán McBride, a native of the Rosses and long-time school principal of my alma mater, St Baithin’s NS, St Johnston in east Donegal. As a former pupil of his, I have long cherished memories of his love for music, mythology and maps. Indeed, I think he is responsible for instilling in me an enduring fascination with maps. In my memory, the only standout visual resources on the walls of our classroom were an image of the Sacred Heart and three large maps, one (naturally!) of Donegal, one of Ireland and one of the world. Lifting his walking-stick and pointing to the global one, the old master would direct our student eyes to discover that our part of Ireland sat snugly, like Moscow, on the 55°N latitude. So far north he would explain, as he looked to Canada, where the ports are normally frozen over for much of the year. Not ours, however, the warm waters of the Gulf Stream mitigating the worst, God’s special gift.

Happy reminiscences of those maps often surprise me. They sparked my imagination as a child and gave me great joy. Yet, such maps are increasingly out of place in the contemporary classroom, replaced by technology, computer screens, iPads. Recently, the UK’s Royal Institute of Navigation, alarmed at the serious decline in map-reading skills among the young, urged schools to return to teaching such skills. It seems that most people today under forty cannot read a landscape or ordnance survey map. Who needs maps and map-readers now when we have GPS navigation and various mobile apps? Map-reading, the Royal Institute - nothing daunted - retorts, is an important life skill which can help develop character, independence and appreciation for maths and science.

The faith and values we share in our schools can be thought of as maps, co-ordinates of meaning and hope which have orientated and inspired many generations. But for many people today such maps are similarly obscured, illegible and even irrelevant. Like the cartographers of the Royal Institute, the Catholic teacher, particularly in relation to faith journeys, ought to be alert to finding new ways to stimulate and better orientate pupils. This, of course, requires creativity and imagination, like that teacher who wrote so charmingly on my heart: ‘For your hearts are like your mountains / In the homes of Donegal’.

This edition, as ever, seeks to encourage, resource and guide: Martin Scanlon, with a similar touch of the mystic, offers a glimpse of how Catholic primary schools in the United States - drawing on their distinctive ethos - are to the fore in modelling ground-breaking, inclusive approaches to special needs education. Alan Ford accounts for both the history of mutually exclusive interpretations of Irish history, especially concerning St Patrick, among Catholics and Anglicans in the past, and the greater ecumenical convergence common today. Ryan Duns explores parallels between scientific and spiritual inquiry in the contemporary school, insisting on the place of both chapel and laboratory in the work of Catholic education. James McAuley muses on the qualities which make for a good teacher as he reflects on the noted Brother Agathon’s Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher (1785). Kieran McKeown suggests that STEM - so prioritised by government and industry today - can be linked more effectively to school values and ethos. Aidan Donaldson and Joan McCombe introduce a welcome new venture, the Catholic Schools Trustee Support Service, which aims to assist schools in the Down and Connor Diocese to deepen their engagement with their ethos. One particular approach to this important work already well-established is Catholic Schools Week and two principals, Roisin Darcy (primary) and Marguerite Hamilton (post-primary) share their reflections on their experience of the celebrations earlier this year in their respective schools. Helping our students to transition well to third-level education is a priority for both schools and parents, so it is helpful that Fr Gerard Magee (chaplain) explains here the services offered at the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen’s University. Underlining the link between home, school and parish, Tracey McKay reviews a significant new book on parish pastoral councils. There are two student voices: Aisling Greene recalling the ways her schools marked the ‘Year of Mercy’ and Anna McCann on World Youth Day 2016.

Finally, our front cover salutes the St Mary’s Gaelic football team for their outstanding achievement in winning the 2017 Sigerson Cup, a wonderful example of faith triumphing over might, a celebration of hope and perseverance by young men who prayed together on their way to victory and on their journey home.

Niall Coll
‘And the world is about to turn!’
Revolutionary Tendencies of Catholic Schooling

Dr Martin Scanlan is Associate Professor at the Department of Higher Education and Educational Leadership, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, Massachusetts, USA

A popular hymn in Catholic churches in the United States is ‘Canticle of the Turning’ (Cooney, 1990). With lyrics drawn from Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-58) and set to the tune of the traditional Irish ballad ‘Star of the County Down,’ it provides a provocative message for this day and age, when so many of our communities are fraught with division and strife. Canticle’s verses decry injustices of violence and tyrannies of poverty, while the chorus resounds a prayer of hope: ‘My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn!’

The song’s central conceit is turning – or, put differently, revolution. Revolution derives from the Latin revolvere, ‘to turn.’ Canticle presents a narrative of revolution, of turning from what is and toward what can be. Acknowledging that troubles persist and inequities abound, the song focuses on the work of God – and by extension, of the faithful – to turn the world toward mercy, compassion, and peace. The climatic fourth verse drives this home:

Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast / God’s mercy must deliver us from the conqueror’s crushing grasp / This saving word that our forebears heard is the promise which holds us bound / ’Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God, who is turning the world around.

I propose this hymn, ‘Canticle of the Turning,’ as an anthem for Catholic schooling in the 21st Century. My thesis is that Catholic schools can and do play a powerfully productive, revolutionary role in our communities. I briefly describe three examples from the United States of America (USA): embracing students with disabilities; culturally and linguistically diverse populations; religiously pluralistic communities. I will then discuss broader implications for the field of Catholic education globally.

Revolutionising Opportunities to Learn: Three Vignettes from the USA

First, picture Malcolm, a second grader at St Ambrose School (all names are pseudonyms). By some accounts, Malcolm is typical: negotiating friendships, developing literacy skills and study habits, preparing for first communion. But because Malcolm has Downs Syndrome, he is, on other accounts, far from typical. Just a few decades ago, the fact that St Ambrose was embracing Malcolm into the school community would be extraordinary in the USA. Now, developing systems to meet students’ special needs is becoming the new normal. The Catholic philosophy of education has long emphasised the dignity of each human person, laying a foundation for educating students like Malcolm (Scanlan, 2008; Vanier, 1998). But only in recent years have Catholic schools in the USA begun developing comprehensive service delivery models that enact this philosophy (Scanlan, 2014, 2017). Organisations such as the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion (http://fullinclusionforcatholicschools.org/) are emerging as brokers fostering this development.

Next, picture All Souls, a small parish school in the outskirts of Los Angeles, California. Five years ago, declining enrollment and soaring costs pushed All Souls to the brink of collapse. Today it is a thriving, innovative school community that may soon need to expand to a new building. What has revolutionised All Souls? A transformation from monolingual to bilingual schooling. In the USA, populations of culturally and linguistically diverse students are growing more than any other (Taylor, 2014). Catholic schools are beginning to recognise and structure these differences as assets to cultivate, not deficits to overcome. This reflects the deep tradition of Catholic schools to affirm the parents as primary educators and a return to the roots of Catholic schooling in the USA as schools organised to serve immigrant communities. All Souls is part of the Two-Way Immersion Network of Catholic schools in the USA...

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Catholic Schools (www.twincs.org), a network of nearly two dozen Catholic schools around the country that are spearheading this revolution.

Finally, picture a bustling cafeteria in the basement of a Catholic elementary school. At one table sits an eclectic group. One student is sitting with her imam from the mosque where she worships. Another with the rabbi from her synagogue. A third is joined by his pastor from the protestant church he attends. And a fourth with his Catholic priest from the school’s parish. This luncheon is an annual event at a school I studied several years ago in an urban area of the USA. Held during Catholic Schools Week, the even was an occasion to celebrate the religious pluralism present in Catholic school communities. As McLaughlin (1996) points out, Catholic education is distinguished by a comprehensive philosophy of the human person, an aspiration to holistic formation, and religious and moral pedagogy.

These dimensions are making Catholic schools in many communities in the USA attractive educational settings for families of diverse faith traditions who are craving the opportunity for schooling that acknowledge and affirm their experience of God. As Grace (2002) asserts, no educational experiences are truly ‘autonomous, objective, neutral, and ideologically free’ (p. 14), but rather all are laden with ‘ideological assumptions about the human person, the ideal society, the ideal system of schooling and the meaning of human existence’ (p. 14). As educational institutions dedicated to cultivating spiritual capital in a secular and market-driven age, Catholic schools are indeed revolutionary.

Moving Forward

These three vignettes illustrate snapshots of some nascent examples of Catholic schools in the USA that are, in the words of the Canticle, turning the world around. They are revolutionary in developing models of service delivery that affirm the dignity and belonging of each and every member, irrespective of special needs. They do so by affirming cultural and linguistic diversity as assets, and in expanding their Catholic identity to affirm the faith traditions of all members of our pluralistic communities. In conclusion, I return to the lyrics of the Canticle to proffer two thoughts on how these examples might spark a broader dialogue in the field of Catholic education across national and cultural contexts.

First, a line in verse one of Canticle calls for the name of God to be blessed ‘from east to west,’ reminding us of the universal scope of the Church. Yet despite the potential to learn with and from one another globally, the vast majority of Catholic educators focus attention only locally. As educators in the field of Catholic education, we must overcome these parochial tendencies that limit our awareness and vision. Consider how the Catholic school serving religiously pluralistic students and families that I referenced above could learn from counterparts in other areas of the world, such as the Latin Patriarchate Schools in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, which intentionally foster interfaith relationships (Madanat & Twal, 2012). In these schools, religion classes are ‘open laboratories’ for dialogue, acceptance of differences and respect for others’ opinion. The religious lifestyle of LPS has an exceptionally constructive impact, which ‘upholds and advances…[a] society where Christians and Muslims bond and live’ (p. 43). Simply put, a greater sharing of practices across Catholic school contexts might strengthen efforts throughout.

Second, a line in verse two of Canticle describes Mary’s essential humility and instrumentality: ‘Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me.’ This reminds us that revolutionary acts are often small, localised efforts. Dorothy Day, a famous social justice activist from the USA who founded the Catholic Worker movement, was known to continually counsel her fellow Catholic Workers to stay small. Staying small allows us to personalise and adapt to our local contexts. Small efforts can have bold effects. For instance, pioneering efforts in a few Canadian Catholic schools broke pathways for the inclusion of students with disabilities and exceptionalities broadly and across educational sectors (Pearpoint & Bunch, 2003).

Catholic schools can be at once grounded and groundbreaking, stable and destabilising. As we face immense struggles both locally and globally, Catholic schools’ revolutionary tendencies can help turn communities toward justice and equity for all of God’s creation.

References

It seems to be all anniversaries in Irish history these days. And this year it’s more than just an Irish commemoration - it is 500 years since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg and began the Protestant Reformation, an event which will be celebrated across Europe. The impact of the Reformation in Ireland was complicated. Though the state, and a large part of the land, became Protestant, the vast majority of the Irish people did not, remaining loyal to the Catholic faith. This created a dilemma for the main Protestant church, the Church of Ireland, when it came to writing its history.

Catholics were quite clear: the established church was imposed on Ireland by Henry VIII; it was English and foreign. Some of the English leaders of the Church of Ireland were content with the idea that the Church was simply an offshoot of the Church of England. But James Ussher (1581-1656), the Dublin-born archbishop of Armagh, saw the Church of Ireland as truly Irish. His 1631 book, A discourse on the religion anciently professed by the Irish, made a bold bid to claim St Patrick for the Church of Ireland. St Patrick’s beliefs, he argued, were much closer to Protestantism than Counter-Reformation Catholicism. Patrick had, he argued, founded the Church of Ireland, a sainted church which had sent missionaries throughout Europe during the early middle ages. This church was independent and had had little to do with the papacy – it was not till the twelfth century that it was brought under Roman control, with the help of St Malachy (archbishop of Armagh 1132-36). From then on, as far as Ussher was concerned, corruptions and abuses increased, leading to the necessity of the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Ussher’s account was highly influential. It sought to create legitimate roots for the Church of Ireland, a way of answering the Catholic taunts of ‘Where was your church before Luther?’ It enabled Irish-born members of the church to identify with their native country, and was used to justify the established church holding all the cathedrals and parish churches. And, most importantly, it set the tone for all subsequent Protestant histories, both academic and popular, right down to the end of the last century.

Unsurprisingly, the Catholic response to this attempt to kidnap Patrick was rapid and robust. They claimed that Patrick had been sent to Ireland by the papacy, and had converted the country to the Roman Catholic religion, to which the Irish people had since then remained staunchly loyal, despite fierce persecution down the ages. Catholics on mainland Europe edited the lives of the early Irish saints, and produced martyrologies of Irishmen and women who had suffered for the faith at the hands of the English. In Ireland, a priest, Geoffrey Keating (c.1569-1644), wrote Foras Feasa ar Éirinn, a history of Ireland up to the arrival of the Normans which was circulated in manuscript, reclaiming the early Irish church and seeking to bring together native Irish and the descendants of the Norman settlers in a common Catholic identity. Protestantism was not a reform movement, it was a heresy. Luther was a son of the devil – Lúitéir mac Lucifer, as Hugh MacCaughwell, Catholic archbishop of Armagh, called him – and Protestants were therefore devil worshippers. The result of this was two parallel but distinct traditions, often dealing with the same basic facts and sources, but interpreting them in starkly different ways. Protestant historians sought wherever possible to diminish the links between the early Irish church and the papacy; Catholic historians magnified them. Protestants combed the writings of early Irish Christians heralding every similarity with the Reformation. Their rivals showed how the early Irish saints were exemplars of Catholic piety and miracle-working.

As they sought to buttress their sectarian position, each side engaged in serious and ground-breaking historical research, identifying and editing new sources. But when it came to interpreting those texts, the familiar biases reappeared, as they were mined for material to support their church’s position. The height of this contested religious history came in 1932, when both churches celebrated – separately, of course – the 1,500th anniversary of St Patrick’s arrival in Ireland.

Nor was this just a matter of recondite academic history. It
reflected fundamental issues of identity and Irishness. And, of course, these rival positions were handed down to successive generations of children through school textbooks. Brought up in southern Ireland as a Protestant, I well remember my uncle, who left school at fourteen, telling me as a child in the 1960s that St Patrick was a Protestant; Catholic friends assure me when they were schoolchildren, that there was never any question that he was, of course, Catholic.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the old certainties were beginning to break down. Within the churches, the hostile paradigms were questioned as, slowly, ecumenism led them emphasise their shared early Christian heritage rather than their polemical post-Reformation rivalries, and as advances in scholarship showed up the contradictions contained in both traditional interpretations. The elaborate versions of Patrick constructed by Protestant and Catholic historians in the image of their own modern church was demolished in 1962 by Daniel Binchy in his path-breaking article ‘St Patrick and his biographers’. Binchy pared down what was known about Patrick to the bare minimum – his confession and the letter to Coroticus and sought to focus attention on the fifth century St Patrick, rather than later stories and myths.

Changes in the way history was produced and who wrote it – began to make an impact. The writing of ecclesiastical history moved from the churches into the universities and became religious history, as academics and research students of various (or no) religious persuasion abandoned the old sectarian assumptions and sought to apply their historical training to new research topics. Catholic and Protestant history, in other words, was gradually replaced by Irish history. The early Irish church, it was generally accepted, had been a part of the western Roman Catholic church, albeit with some idiosyncratic elements, whilst Patrick had to be studied in his own time, not through the lenses of the Reformation or Counter-Reformation.

Both sides could claim his legacy. Bias and prejudice of course persist – history aspires to objectivity but never quite gets there. But the assumptions which historians bring to their history writing are now more personal than institutional and denominational. The new, ecumenical St Patrick, suitable for Irishmen of all religious persuasions, has been carefully packaged by the hospitality industry, and can be seen in places such as Downpatrick (where the saint is supposedly buried) in the £6m St Patrick Visitor Centre.

(Thanks to the Representative Church Body in Dublin for permission to use the picture of the stained glass window of St Patrick from Jordanstown parish church in Co. Antrim. Further images of St Patrick can be seen at the wonderful website of Church of Ireland windows at http://www.gloine.ie/)

Scientific Inquiry and the Catholic School

Fr Ryan Duns SJ, from Cleveland, Ohio is a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at Boston College, Massachusetts, USA. He taught theology, philosophy and Latin at the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy 2009-12. He is an accomplished musician and teacher of the Irish tin whistle (see https://www.youtube.com/user/RyanDunsSJ)

In September of 2016, a Catholic school in inner city Detroit opened a $15 million STEM building. In a city known more for its economic woes and racial unrest, it is remarkable that a Catholic school would raise such an enormous fund from private donors for a building dedicated to the study of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Has the Society of Jesus, which sponsors the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy, finally recognised what so many of the new atheists would have us believe, that we should abandon the study of theology and dedicate ourselves exclusively to the pursuit of science and technology? More waggishly posed: Why build a chapel when you could build a chemistry lab?

During my years as a secondary school teacher, students were often gob-smacked when I emphasised, over and again, that religion and science, faith and reason, were not at odds with one another. ‘Yes, lads, you can be a thinking believer!’ Indeed, I insisted that both the chapel and the chemistry lab must be seen as integral to Catholic education. Each provides a venue for the rigorous and disciplined exploration of reality in all of its beauty and perplexity. In both settings, the student learns never to settle for facile answers to questions, pressing onward in a quest not merely to acquire information but, more importantly, to understand more deeply the intricacy of creation. At the heart of authentic theological and scientific inquiry, there abides a courageous spirit that does not recoil in fear from asking pointed and incisive questions. Thus, in a sense, we might regard both the liturgy and the laboratory as apprenticeship programmes wherein one is trained to see what to superficial eyes remains otherwise undetected.

The ritual of inquiry

Science teachers know the frustration of trying to guide students through dimensional analysis and Punnett’s squares, of memorising the Krebs Cycle and of deriving physics equations. To instruct them, we lead them through a process: identify the known, isolate the unknown, and employ a strategy to find an answer to our question. We insist students ‘show their work’ and demonstrate that they have gone through all the steps necessary to reliably arrive at the correct answer. Even if they do not recognise it, teachers are indoctrinating students into the ritual of inquiry. By rote practice, memorisation, and some cajoling, we encourage students to adopt
as habitual the rituals of disciplined inquiry. But, as we know, repetition is seldom a mark of intellectual excellence: we expect our students to probe deeply and engage creatively with the material. We encourage them to confront what is known with questions that push the boundaries of knowledge, turn up new insights, and make richer the realm of science. Rituals of guided inquiry make possible the work, the liturgy, of science.

Frustration, irritation, some sweat, fruitless and failed searches: these are not limited to the laboratory! Anyone who has spent time in real prayer, anyone who has allowed the ritual of the liturgy to draw his or her spirit more deeply into the depths of prayer, knows that there is no assured formula for success. Neither public liturgy nor private prayer furnishes practitioners with never-fail incantations. Instead, we have as part of our heritage of spiritual inquiry rituals that have reliably guided generations of seekers into a deeper relationship with the Creator. Every now and again, we are given the grace of a Eureka moment of radical insight as the hours of time spent in arid prayer reveal an expanded horizon that gives the individual a renewed appreciation for the power and majesty of the Holy One.

Catholic educators should encourage the study of science for the same reason we hope for frequent participation in the Eucharist: by pushing, prodding our students to peer beneath the surface, by wading into the dark waters of the unknown, we enable them to risk being struck by insight and shaken by revelation. Training our students in the rituals of inquiry – theological and scientific – we empower them to enter into the greater liturgy of creation where they may be ‘caught up’ in the beauty of nature and find inexhaustible delight in their realisation that, no matter how many questions one answers, a new question will arise that will elicit one to explore further.

Both chapel and laboratory

Patient and deliberate inquiry, attentive to ritual and appreciative of the vast liturgy into which we are called: these are traits shared by theologians and scientists. Both the chapel and the laboratory are necessary because both are arenas wherein we can risk an encounter with our Creator. We train our students in the chapel and the laboratory because they complement each other marvelously. Patience, wasted time, and steadfast perseverance are as necessary for obtaining, analysing, and processing data as they are every time we dare to pray. We, as teachers, invite our students to become what we know ourselves to be: apprentices to those who have come before us and who continue to inspire us as we press on in our inquiry. A student need not become another Marie Curie or Richard Dawkins, a Mother Teresa or St Francis for them to be successful. Our students, and our Church, succeed when they see that we are enriched by their investigations and that we, their teachers and fellow seekers, support their unwillingness to accept facile answers to their most pressing questions. Both science and theology encourage students to enter more deeply into the liturgy of creation and to celebrate the richness found therein.

Imagine what might happen if we taught theology, or encouraged students to experience the Eucharist, with the same brio with which we teach biology, chemistry, and physics. We could approach the Eucharist as the moment in the liturgy in which the matter we study actually addresses us and beckons us to approach, to question, and to celebrate the Mystery at the heart of reason itself? Contrary to the worries of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, who fear that religious education clouds human reason, we just may find ourselves graced with our own Athanasius Kirchner and Gregor Mendel: models of faithful reason who consecrated scientific exploration to the greater honour and glory of God.

References


Why not be a Teacher?

Dr James McAuley is a mathematics teacher at Our Lady and St Patrick’s College, Belfast

An early scene from the classic film A Man For All Seasons (1966), imagines an encounter between the great St Thomas More, then Lord Chancellor of England, and Richard Rich, an amoral hanger-on who spent his time ingratiating himself to More and his friends hoping for political advancement and the trappings of power. More, knowing Rich’s motives, pleaded with him to consider a better option for his soul’s sake: becoming a teacher.

St Thomas More: Why not be a teacher? You’d be a fine teacher; perhaps a great one.
Richard Rich: If I was, who would know it?
St Thomas More: You; your pupils; your friends; God. Not a bad public, that.

Dr James McAuley is a mathematics teacher at Our Lady and St Patrick’s College, Belfast.

There is remarkable insight in this brief exchange. The vocation of teaching, if fully committed to, does indeed offer a pathway for spiritual betterment.

In The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher (1785), Brother Agathon (fifth Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools) offers an enlightening overview of the virtues required of a Catholic school teacher. Even allowing for language that might appear at first a little old fashioned, the list makes fascinating reading. The
first virtue, Gravity, is required to win the students’ esteem and respect as students would not listen to what is taught them by a teacher whom they cannot look up to. Silence, writes Br Agathon, is a virtue which leads the teacher to avoid talking when he must not speak and to speak when he should not be silent since ‘teachers who talk a lot are hardly listened to’. For Humility, good teachers should know full well their own insufficiencies and be humble of mind and heart, and in actions, by behaving in consequence in all they do. Prudence is a virtue which makes teachers understand what they need to do and what they need to avoid in the education of their pupils’ minds and hearts. Br Agathon recommends Wisdom since a good teacher must be well instructed concerning what they wish to teach, otherwise they would be ‘a reciter of formulas, and the students would only learn names, which they would promptly forget’. A good teacher should have Patience by not taking to heart bad manners or behaviour, and by not growing disheartened or weary from repeating the same things often and at length.

Good teachers display Reserve by controlling themselves in circumstances where they might grow angry or upset; teachers should regulate their conduct so that the student may not observe anything untoward in them. Gentleness requires a teacher to apply discipline that is neither harsh nor forbidding, while a teacher who shows Zeal is like ‘a lamp placed on a lamp stand, which of course gives light by its shining, but which must also warm by its heat’. To practise Vigilance, a teacher must watch over themselves to fulfil their obligations worthily and be vigilant over their pupils in the role of their guardian angel. A teacher’s Piety, Br Agathon writes, should be both interior and sincere for otherwise they would be only a hypocrite; it should also be outward and exemplary because they should show exteriorly the sentiments which fill their heart. And finally, good teachers must possess Generosity since they devote themselves for life to a career ‘most honourable in itself, no doubt, but also very laborious and very tedious for nature, and which, far from appearing honourable in the eyes of men, seems to them on the contrary commonplace and lowly’. Teaching therefore calls its practitioners to develop virtues not just for the benefit of their pupils but also for the benefit of their own souls. Of all these virtues it would seem that the last, generosity, was the one St Thomas More saw as most necessary for Richard Rich. The advice was not heeded. More, in heroic obedience to his conscience and his Catholic faith, did not assent to the marriage of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Based on the perjured testimony of Rich, More was sentenced to death for high treason.

In the film, as Rich steps down from the witness stand, More realises that Rich was made Attorney General for Wales as a reward for his false testimony and addresses Rich directly: ‘For Wales? Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world… But for Wales?’ St Thomas More lost his head but Richard Rich lost his integrity and may indeed have lost his soul. It may be true that teaching does not carry the same prestige as other professions, but the potential for good of a fine teacher is something we have all experienced. St Thomas More’s advice - that of an acclaimed lawyer - still holds true: our pupils, our friends, God - not a bad public, that.

STEM Education: A Christian Perspective

Dr Kieran McGeown, St Mary’s University College, Belfast

It can be argued that, at its most basic level, the purpose of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education in schools is intended to enhance young people’s understanding of the potential synergy between the four subject disciplines. However, as Christians, we surely have a responsibility to ensure that the pedagogical strategies we implement for STEM Education are not based purely on knowledge content alone. If this approach was taken pertinent issues concerning how best STEM-based knowledge can be applied for the benefit of humankind might not be addressed. As an example, an often used saying is that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’; however which of the current human necessities are we as a society addressing when applying STEM based knowledge to solve problems?

In today’s modern society we have multiple ways of communicating with each other without ever having to actually meet the other person in the flesh. We have instant access to music via the various streaming providers and the choice from hundreds of different TV channels via a single remote control. In other words, we have the ability to create our own virtual world without ever leaving the comfort of our own surroundings. Our young people rely on these digital devices for entertainment and socialising, but are they being made aware of how privileged they really are compared to millions throughout the world who live in either relative or even absolute poverty? I would argue that STEM Education should also include looking critically at how the marvels of technological development are being used to improve both the life and dignity of peoples who live in the poorer regions of the world.

One example of a technological advance which was focussed on addressing the needs of people from economically deprived communities was the wind-up
radio. It does not need batteries, was invented by a Mr Trevor Bayliss and it enabled people in remote parts of the globe to listen to educational programmes via radio. The fact that no batteries were used meant that there was no cost associated with using the radio; this opened up a ‘new world’ of education to poorer people which had previously been denied them. In this instance, the innovative application of STEM knowledge to an iterative process of product design, and one that was not shackled by the need to make profit provided a viable technological option for thousands of poor and vulnerable people.

Technological advances can be put to uses that enhance the human condition, but that same technology, used for a different purpose, can also bring human life to an end. This is a dilemma which the human race has always faced: a rock can be used to crack open a nut but also a human skull. Drone technology is, for example, one of the latest technologies to be embraced by commercial companies, governments, and schools: it is also a technology that is hugely valued by the military for its ability to enable them to engage in ‘remote warfare,’ targeting human beings from afar.

An effective STEM Education strategy is hugely important for the young people of today. However, I would suggest that for it to be inclusive of the Christian ethos it needs to address, among other things, the issues of how its potential might be used for the care of God’s creation and for the preservation of life and the dignity of the human person who inhabits that creation. In this way we are empowering our young people to understand both their rights and their responsibilities as citizens of the world.

The Down and Connor Catholic Schools Trustee Support Service

‘Where there is no vision the people perish’ (Proverbs 29:18)

Dr Aidan Donaldson and Mrs Joan McCombe, Down and Connor Catholic Schools Trustee Support Service, Belfast

Without renewal there is no growth or new life. This is as true in all aspects of human living, relationships and institutions as it is in the world of nature. It is also true in relation to education. Catholic schools are based on a unique vision of education that marks them off from all other schooling sectors. By virtue of this distinctive ethos, Catholic schools seek to accompany each child in his/her personal, intellectual, spiritual and professional development.

At its core is the teaching that each student as a child of God - created in His image and likeness - must be valued, affirmed and cherished and educated in a way that enlightens the mind, illuminates possibilities and unlocks the divine potential so that each can have life and ‘Have it to the full.’ (Jn 10:10). All else - academic results, personal growth, professional development, the promotion of social justice and the common good - will indeed follow if the vision of school, as an expression of a living faith-filled community, aligned to the mission of the Church is practiced. In providing an education based on Gospel values and a vision of humankind created in such an image, Catholic schools are able to engage with the whole curriculum and make sacred the secular in a very real and meaningful way.

Of course, an ethos is only as powerful as the way it is actually lived out in practice. Otherwise, it simply becomes a pious aspiration that is referred to in mission statements and other documents, but is absent in the everyday reality and life of the school.

The Down and Connor Catholic Schools Trustee Support Service (CSTSS) is a new and exciting diocesan initiative that seeks to help the family of Catholic schools to reflect on the distinctive vision of Catholic education and to provide support for individual schools to make this ethos part of a lived-faith that will animate every aspect of life in a Catholic school. We have produced a resource folder, Catholic Ethos: A Framework for Self-Reflection, that aims to assist schools in their work of promoting ethos and creating an intentional Catholic school. There is no aspect of the life and curriculum of the Catholic school which is not relevant to its Catholic ethos. This framework for self-reflection is based around seven key areas that provide focus for the self-reflection process:

• The Mission
• Religious Education
• Catholic Leadership
The CSTSS has been actively engaging with school principals and governors, bringing together clusters of schools for reflection and celebration, providing retreats for whole school staff. We are also preparing to work with RE co-ordinators, Heads of RE departments and school chaplains. We aim to place ourselves at the service of schools which wish to develop the wonderful gift of Catholic education in the context of the family of Catholic schools in the diocese. Catholic schools are called to deep renewal - to restore, refresh, proclaim, re-energise and celebrate our vision and our mission. Open to all, inclusive and welcoming - yet distinctive. The CSTSS sees itself as responding to the call of Pope Francis for all of us in Catholic education to make our schools missionary and prophetic, centres of catechesis and evangelisation, living communities of faith that will inspire, challenge and enlighten a world that stands in need of the redemption the Good News heralds. ‘Our generation will show that it can rise to the promise found in each young person when we know how to give them space. This means that we have to create the material and spiritual conditions for their full development; to give them a solid basis on which to build their lives; to guarantee their safety and their education to be everything they can be.’ (Pope Francis, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, 2013)

Principal and Catholic Schools Week
A Primary Perspective

Mrs Roisin Darcy is Principal of Christ the King PS, Strathroy, Omagh, Co. Tyrone

Catholic education strives to make a real difference in the lives of the young people we serve, and Catholic Schools’ Week is a great opportunity for us to celebrate and acknowledge all that we do on a daily basis in our schools as we live out our distinctive mission and ethos.

Here at Christ the King there was much time dedicated to planning events and activities. Catholic schools, of course, do much more that teach an RE Curriculum and this truth was at the forefront of our planning for Catholic Schools Week. Indeed, our planning involved us working together with the principals and staffs of the other primary schools in Cappagh parish. Thus all five schools came together to celebrate Mass in Christ the King Church. It was no mean feat organising what initially seemed impossible, namely, bringing over 900 primary school children together for prayer. But it proved to be a great success. Teachers and staff in all of the schools are committed to the Catholic ethos and were delighted to participate in the events. It wasn’t seen as merely something else ‘to do’, on top of the already hectic schedule of school life.

In our planning and implementation, we took to heart his year’s theme for Catholic Schools Week: Learning with Pope Francis to Care for our Common Home. During the Mass, five oak saplings were presented to each of the schools. Little did I know when I agreed to get the saplings for each of the schools, just how difficult they would be to source particularly at this time of year! One of the most enjoyable celebrations of our school calendar, and an integral part of Catholic Schools Week, is Grandparents Assembly. We recognise that grandparents play a critical role in the faith formation of the whole family. In today’s society, not only are grandparents more hands on in general with their grandchildren, they are also recognised as essential to the handing on of faith to the next generation. Classroom teachers and staff are aware of sensitive issues such as a recent loss of a grandparent, or the concerns of those without a grandparent to bring along. Thus, we have an open invitation to all grandparents, parents and extended family to help us celebrate as a school
community. The children wait eagerly with pride and excitement to show their special guests what they have made for them, be it a picture they have painted of them or a poem they have written about them. I know this day is special for all grandparents and, happily, they leave the school with a treasured photo of them with their grandchild.

In today’s secular society we face real challenges in Catholic schools. Thankfully, celebrations such as Catholic Schools Week allow us to come together in very special ways with families and the parish community to acknowledge and celebrate all that we are and do. That’s why we are already looking forward to the celebrations next year! ‘Hope lets new life blossom, like a plant that grows from the seed fallen on the earth.’ (Pope Francis Tweet, 26 January, 2017)

A Post-Primary Perspective

Ms Marguerite Hamilton is Principal of Thornhill College, Derry and a member of the Columba Community, Derry

During Catholic Schools Week every year we attend the Diocesan celebration of the Eucharist in our local cathedral, St Eugene’s. We gather with primary and post primary schools throughout the diocese, seeing young people from various schools in urban and rural settings reading the Word, singing and offering prayer. Catholic Schools’ Week is a reminder of our common link and gives expression to the notion that we belong to a wider church circle. It witnesses to the call to community and in celebrating the Eucharist - the sacrament that helps us to define who we are as Catholics - we reaffirm this sense of belonging.

During this week as we celebrate Catholic education and articulate what we are trying to live, and the context from which we work, it may prompt those of us in leadership to reflect on the wider issue of the explicit values inherent in Catholic education. I say ‘perhaps’ for in truth sometimes the day to day management issues take priority over the leadership to which we are called as Catholic educators, leadership that animates others and encourages their God-given gifts and talents; leadership that focuses on the person of Jesus and the trust he has in each one of us as we co-operate with his Spirit to usher in the Kingdom. As I read over these words I find them challenging and maybe this is one of the functions of Catholic Schools Week, to act as a reminder of the need to reflect on the distinctive features of Catholic education.

In our school this year there was something different about Catholic Schools Week. It may have been that the theme chosen - Learning with Pope Francis to Care for Our Common Home - presented us with a singularly tangible focus for our prayer, reflection and action. It is important that we help our young people to see and articulate that the social outreaches in which we are involved come from our desire to live as Jesus in the scriptures teaches us to live.

We took the decision to look at the main teaching of Pope Francis’s ecological encyclical, Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home (2015) in Religious Education classes. Students then wrote pledges, deciding to make one small practical change that would help the environment. These pledges were then placed on the Trees of Hope in the school oratory so that everyone could see and read the promises. They ranged from the ambitious and specific ‘I won’t use my mobile phone for a day,’ to the promise to ‘switch off lights when I leave the room’.

In the invitation from Pope Francis to ‘transform our relationship with the world,’ he reminded us that Catholic schools are full of potential and can help to bring about tangible changes in our daily lives which will have global impact. This connecting to the wider world and the invitation to look around us and to do as Jesus did, crossing boundaries, whether to engage with the Samaritan Woman at the Well or to feed the hungry or to heal on the Sabbath, is not only encouraging but empowering. Catholic Schools Week has a place in helping us to focus on ‘who are we’ and ‘what we stand for,’ taking time, however briefly, to celebrate and give thanks for our unique call and ministry to the young people in our care.

The Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen’s

Fr Gerard N. Magee, Catholic Chaplain, Queen’s University Belfast. He can be contacted at g.magee@downandconnor.org; Facebook: The Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB

Situated in generous accommodation on Elmwood Avenue, and within a few minutes’ walk of the Lanyon Building, the Students’ Union and the McClay Library, the Catholic Chaplaincy has exercised, for over one hundred years, a profound influence on university life, for staff and students alike, at Queen’s.

In many ways, and especially in the recent past, it has provided an oasis of calm, prayer and dialogue in a city which has seen more than its fair share of strife and tension, be that religious, political or social.

The challenge of proclaiming the Gospel and finding concrete means to nourish Catholic witness on campus is an ever-changing one. The University - established by its Statutes as a secular institution – has no distinct religious ethos, and yet makes ample room for the work of the various chaplains, valuing, as it does, the engagement of the whole person at all levels, and seeing the quiet, often hidden work of chaplaincies as vital to ongoing formation and support of all who are part
of life at Queen's. And so the Catholic Chaplaincy, in its work and vision, while maintaining its own distinct character and values, knits together with the various other University departments to ensure that this holistic educational experience both supports and stretches at all human levels.

In an age when the new evangelisation expects all of us to revisit and renew our ideas and practices in regard to a living Catholic faith, the work of the Chaplaincy is asked to grow and develop. Gone are the days when the majority of Catholic students and staff made their way automatically to the Chaplaincy facilities. With the very real pressures from an increasingly aggressive secular society, the Chaplaincy is learning to find ways to reach out to students and engage them in their own conversations and struggles, discerning above all the needs which they themselves feel are most pressing. This is a slow movement from previously presumed imposition of models to remodelling around needs.

Of course, in the usual round of the week’s activity at the Chaplaincy, a solid foundation is still provided, centred above all on a sacramental life, complemented by educational and social events. Daily celebration of the Eucharist in the Corpus Christi Chapel, the regular celebration - after Masses and on request - by many students of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the weekly prayer group times, celebrations by various on-campus Catholic groups, and services provided by the Chaplain, organised in conjunction with University staff members and students, indicate a very healthy and growing Catholic culture and practice.

Above all, a renewed desire to become articulate, intellectually vibrant, confident professional Catholics who can bring their faith forward in a challenging social and political local and global milieu is beginning to be felt here. Perhaps that is the greatest challenge of all – to provide precisely that measure of challenge and support which galvanises the always rich Catholic dynamic between faith and reason, but which is grounded in a convinced personal experience of faith identity. Such an invitation continues to fire the imagine and work of all those who serves the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen’s.

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Mercy at Mount Lourdes

Aisling Greene is a Year 14 student at Mount Lourdes Grammar School, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. She is deputy leader on the Senior Prefect Team and leader of the school’s Liturgy Committee

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which ended last November was particularly important for our school and I want to tell you how we marked it.

Led by the Religious Education Department and the Liturgy Committee, the school responded enthusiastically to Pope Francis’ invitation to all schools to open a ‘door of mercy.’ So during Catholic Education Week 2016 we did just that, opening our very own ‘Door of Mercy’. The door – or rather doors – used for this purpose was a set of centrally located double doors that students, staff and visitors pass through regularly to cross the so-called Red Bridge. Mention of a bridge was so apt when you recall that Pope Francis has described mercy as ‘the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever ...’

Our Principal Mrs Mc Keever, spoke of the door as a daily reminder to all who pass through it, to be open and willing to receive and share God’s mercy. Our school chaplain Canon Macartan McQuaid pointed out, ‘When we open a door into someone’s house we come into their home and into their lives. God invites us to come through the door of Mercy into his total acceptance and love.’ During this Jubilee Year Pope Francis encouraged all Christians to make a pilgrimage and enter through Holy Doors. Last June the Religious Education Department took all Year 8 students to visit our Diocesan Holy Door in St Macartan’s Cathedral, Monaghan. While there the students were thrilled to meet the (since retired) bishop of Clogher, Dr Liam McDaid, who welcomed us so warmly.
It has been a long standing tradition in Mount Lourdes that Year 9 students make a pilgrimage to the Knock Shrine in County Mayo with their religion teachers. Indeed, the practice is fondly recalled by earlier generations of students as, ‘the day we rock Knock.’ The students were very moved to see the beautiful new mosaic depicting the vision of the apparition of Our Lady there. These students were also afforded the opportunity to walk through the shrine’s Holy Door, which was a specially commissioned white archway leading to the Chapel of Reconciliation. They also visited the museum, took a guided walking tour and visited the graves of the visionaries. The pilgrimage ended with the celebration of the Year 9 End of Year Mass in the shrine’s Old Chapel. During the Mass, our students dramatised the story of the apparition and sang the hymn, ‘Our Lady of Knock.’ School assemblies throughout this Jubilee Year of Mercy reflected Pope Francis’ message, ‘We are to give mercy to others if we are able to receive mercy from God.’ On the feast of St Vincent De Paul (September 26), we were all challenged to follow his example in caring for those in need. Pope Francis has deemed Mother Teresa of Calcutta to be an icon of mercy and it is fitting that he canonised her during this Jubilee Year. To mark her canonisation, we have been studying her life and work this year during our Religious Education and Life Programme, with special emphasis on encouraging everyone to follow her example in caring for the poor and needy - the corporal works of mercy. The Year of Mercy was a time of grace and opportunity to grow in love and mercy within our families, school and community. Though the Jubilee Year is over, it is our intention here at Mount Lourdes to retain our Door of Mercy. After all, the work of mercy is endless.

Kraków World Youth Day

Anna McCann, from Toomebridge, Co. Antrim, is a second year Physical Education student at St Mary’s University College, Belfast, studying to become a primary school teacher. She is a member of the Down and Connor diocesan ‘Living Youth’ team.

Our World Youth Day 2016 pilgrimage began in the Czech Republic - ‘Days in the Diocese’ - when we spent four days in Prague exploring, site seeing and meeting other WYD groups from across the world. There was much praying, singing, dancing and bonding. We explored some of the city’s great landmarks: Prague Castle, St Vitus’ Cathedral, St George’s Basilica, the Old Town Square, the Astronomical Clock, the Holy Child of Prague and so much more. Then, we journeyed by coach to the beautiful city of Kraków. The bus took around six hours but that didn’t get in the way of the fun and excitement!

Upon arrival in Krakow, we ventured out for some food and sightseeing: there were thousands of young people, from all over the world, gathered in the famous Kraków Square. On the second day, we visited the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy that contains the remains of Saint Faustina. Later that evening, we went to the infamous concentration camp at Auschwitz: it was an emotional and prayerful experience. The following day we went to visit Częstochowa and the famous ‘Black Madonna’ painting. What an amazing experience getting to celebrate Mass here! That evening, the Living Youth team visited the famous Salt Mines, where we sang to everyone present and it was truly magical.

The group walked to Blonia Park on the Thursday for Pope Francis’ arrival and address. We were fairly close to the main stage and it was wonderful being in the presence of the Pope and millions of other young people. On Friday, the group made the Stations of the Cross and we celebrated the sacrament of confession. On Saturday, the Living Youth team began our pilgrimage to the Vigil Site, Campus Misericordiae. That night, millions of pilgrims from...
all over the world joined us in the ‘Field of Mercy’ for a Saturday night prayer vigil with the Pope. A truly unforgettable experience. Everyone camped out that night and got up in the morning to celebrate Mass with Pope Francis. This wonderful event was the highlight of the World Youth Day experience, and the sun shone brightly throughout!

Being on WYD opened my eyes to how faith is still very relevant today in the lives of young people. I have no doubt that it deepened me spiritually. I am conscious since that it has helped me to live out more actively my life as a Christian in today’s society. Many thousands of the other young present undoubtedly feel the same. The whole experience has taught me I am part of a truly universal Church; faith was nurtured and friendships were formed, hopefully life-long ones! I can’t wait until WYD in Panama in 2019!

Famine was declared in parts of South Sudan in February 2017. 100,000 are affected, and a further 4.6 million people in the country - 40 per cent of the population - are at risk over the coming months. Trócaire has been working in the region for over 40 years. Our current focus is on humanitarian support. Please contribute whatever you can.
However, it is easy to overlook the extent to which they represent an entirely new form of collaborative leadership in the life of the Church. Perhaps, like me, you will be familiar with an ‘older’ concept, one that came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s. Like today’s parish pastoral council, the older ‘parish council’ took its inspiration from the Second Vatican Council’s teaching, concerning the role of the laity in the life of the Church.

Why did these older initiatives not bear fruit? The authors suggest it was because something was missing: co-responsibility - that is the laity and the clergy together being co-responsible for the life of the Church. An important catalyst for change came about with the appointment of Diarmuid Martin as Archbishop of Dublin in 2004. His belief in the value of parish pastoral councils, the need to embed co-responsibility into parish life, and the importance of formation and training of members of parish pastoral councils has proven transformative. As this book explains, contemporary parish pastoral councils represent a completely new way of thinking about pastoral life and leadership within the Church.

This book is simultaneously the ‘story’ of change in local communities as they journey towards co-responsibility and a ‘toolkit’ for those embarking on the process of establishing and maintaining a parish pastoral council. Clearly it will appeal to those who are involved in setting up parish pastoral councils. However, it will also appeal to the general reader, documenting as it does the significant changes shaping local faith communities, their synergy with the diocese and the universal Church. Four key themes guide the reader: Part one focuses on building partnership; the concept of co-responsibility is examined and a vision of what a Church led by the Holy Spirit might look like is explored. Part two addresses the practical steps involved in setting up a parish pastoral council and the training and formation required. Readers will find advice and guidance on ‘how to’ approach key activities such as: establishing a parish core group; actively listening through a parish survey; calling and facilitating a parish assembly.

The need for appropriate training is considered and a step by step guide to delivering a residential weekend is presented. Part three explores the challenges once a parish pastoral council has been formed and offers encouragement and guidance on moving forward. Taking inspiration from the late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich who, speaking at the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1987, famously likened the laity of the Church to a sleeping giant capable of doing immense work for the Kingdom of God, the authors suggest collaborative strategies suited to this awakening task (p. 109). Part four deals with strategic vision, as parish pastoral councils endeavour to make sense of the facts, attitudes and perceptions that will invariably shape their mission. The book concludes as it opened with a gentle but powerful reminder for members of parish pastoral councils: ‘do not be afraid, trust in the Holy Spirit who will be their guide as they: discern; decide; implement and involve others to build the Kingdom of God’.

Dr Tracey McKay, St Mary’s University College, Belfast

Our front cover salutes the St Mary’s Gaelic football team team for their outstanding achievement in winning the 2017 Sigerson Cup, a wonderful example of faith triumphing over might, a celebration of hope and perseverance by young men who prayed together on their way to victory and on their journey home.