

# Catholic Education Week 2016

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*Sunday, 7 February 2016*

## ***Dear friends***

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to address you at the end of this year's Catholic Education Week.

The theme for this week is "Learning to be Merciful". This is inspired by Pope Francis' declaration that this is a Year of Mercy. In today's Gospel, Simon Peter declares his sinfulness to Jesus and asks him to leave him alone. Jesus responds with mercy. He reassures and calms Simon Peter's fears...and then offers a challenge: be fishers of people!

'Mercy' is a hard idea to communicate – especially to our children and young people. Perhaps this is because it is more than one thing – it is love, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, patience, tolerance, tenderness – all wrapped up together. It is about how we *feel* and how we *act*. Pope Francis is clear about the power of mercy. He says, 'A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just'.

Pope Francis challenges us to put our faith into action: to warm our hearts towards others and seek a fair world for all.

Catholic schools, including your local primary school (whether St John's, St Stephen's, St Dominic's, Our Lady's) and your local secondary of St John's, are challenged to be merciful: to model love, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, patience, tolerance, tenderness, and to nurture these virtues within our school communities. We can't do this alone! Parents are the first and most important teachers of every child, and together with grandparents, families, friends and the wider Church community, show in their actions what mercy looks like in our day-to-day lives.

By showing what mercy is to our children and young people we demonstrate how important this is. This doesn't mean we shouldn't respond to poor behaviour or negative attitudes – it is always important to challenge and support our children and young people to make the best choices. But the virtue of mercy also asks us to provide opportunities to

those who harm us: we are asked to give them a chance to resolve the harm and restore our broken relationship. In our schools, we do this daily through restorative practices – seeking to resolve conflict through forgiveness and making up for the harm done.

The Year of Mercy is a timely reminder that human beings are not perfect. We are complicated and messy – and that is as true for a small child as an adult. Our schools are not perfect either – it is important we recognise this openly. We don't know all the answers (except for those in the answer book!). Your Catholic school needs your mercy and support too!

Throughout the Year of Mercy our pupils will be learning about mercy and being challenged to be merciful through putting their faith into action. All of our Catholic schools have a deep commitment to local and international charities. We empower our children and young people to make our world a fairer place to grow up for everyone. We respect the rights of one another, treating each other with what psychologist Carl Rogers would call 'unconditional positive regard', and with what Christians know as 'agape' – brotherly and sisterly love at all times. We nurture the whole child and put into practice our values through our relationships with one another. We sometimes make mistakes and we learn from these, seeking the mercy of others.

Christ tells us that those who are merciful will have mercy shown them. This is a powerful, positive message about the goodness of people and the goodness of God. In this year that we 'learn to be merciful', let us together – in school, in our parishes and in our homes – share this lesson together.

Finally, thank you for all the support you give to your Catholic schools. It is wonderful to know that we are part of a bigger family, and your generosity in so many different ways is always appreciated. Thank you too to our priests and our bishop who give so much of their time to ensuring we provide the best possible Catholic education within our communities.



God bless and every best wish,

*Seán Hagney*

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