



Catholic Schools Week 2018

Moment Two: Families of Faith

Boards of Management

Introduction

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best assist them in their task as Christian educators (CCC, 2229). In this way the Catholic school occupies a privileged place within the eucharistic community, the parish, as it moves towards assisting parents in fulfilling their duty of educating their children in the faith (CCC, 2226). In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis recognises that such an integral education is made 'difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today's world, where many people keep up a frantic pace just to survive' (287). As members of boards of management, it is easy to recognise that the many issues presented by the frantic pace of life today as well as today's consumerist culture are being confronted on a daily basis by members of the school family. In addressing these matters Catholic schools have a unique resource to assist them: God's gift of faith.

It is important that God's gift of faith continues to be nurtured amidst the Catholic school family. Members of the board of management are entrusted with the noble duty of ensuring that their Catholic school continues to be a place in which one learns 'to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour' (AL, 287). As members of boards of management in Catholic schools, we bear witness to this noble duty by creating an environment in which 'tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule' (CCC, 2223). Members of boards of management complement the work of parents by ensuring that Catholic schools facilitate 'an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgement and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom' (CCC, 2223). God's gift of faith enables one to be truly free, to live a life that is reflective of authentic Christian freedom in an age that is dominated by superficial human relationships.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that 'a mustard seed, small as it is, becomes a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31–2)' and that 'this teaches us to see the disproportion between our actions and their effects' (287). As members of boards of management in Catholic schools, we must continue to ask God to act in our hearts, and pray that He continues to give us the strength to offer our creative commitment by which we cooperate with His divine plan in nurturing His gift of faith and passing it on to the next generation.

Reflections

- Are there any ways in which the Board of Management could do more to enrich the faith development of staff and students in the school?
- In what way could Board of Management meetings have a stronger faith dimension? (e.g. an opening prayer, ethos is discussed as an agenda item at each meeting)
- 'Couples and parents should be properly appreciated as active agents in catechesis' (AL, 287). Could your school enhance its engagement with parents concerning matters of faith development? If so, how?
- In Catholic schools 'the Good News needs to resound, in good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way' (AL, 290). Can you identify any ways in which your school could enrich its evangelical action?



Prayer

To be a Faith School

Lord, we pray this evening at our board meeting that our school community will continue always to be a faith-sharing community which proclaims and lives the Gospel, transforming people in the Catholic faith. May our staff, students and parents grow closer to you, become ever more comfortable and confident with their own religious identity in this challenging world, and develop both deep spirituality and compassionate humanity as they journey through life.

We say together:
Our Father ...

(Prayer taken from the CEIST Booklet Prayers for Chairs:

www.ceist.ie/_uploads/_ckpg/files/Faith%20Development/Prayers%20for%20Chairs.pdf)

W Watch

iCatholic video about a family returning to Catholic school (7 min 35 sec):
www.icatholic.ie/returning-school-family-story/

R Read

Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*), 7:
w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for our Common Home*), 79, 96, 199–200, 229:
w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf

Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), 122–6:
w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

Saint John Paul II, apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (*The Role of the Christian Family*), 40:
w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.pdf



Staff to Staff

Introduction

As teachers in Catholic schools we complement the work of parents by assisting them in their duty to educate their children in the faith. In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasised the evangelical power of popular piety (EG, 122–6). In *Amoris Laetitia* he reaffirms that ‘children need symbols, actions and stories’ to form them in the faith (288). Pope Francis notes that ‘education in the faith has to adapt to each child, since older resources and recipes do not always work’. As teachers working in Catholic post-primary schools, we are always sensitive to our students’ pattern of growth. We are no strangers to the resistance commonly expressed by adolescents when authority and rules confront them. Therefore, as experienced Catholic educators teaching in the faith, we recognise that it is best to encourage adolescents’ own experience of faith. Catholic educators desirous of nurturing the faith of their students do not move towards indoctrination for we know that ‘spiritual experience is not imposed but freely proposed’. In this way, Catholic schools do not impose faith upon students, for faith is a gift from God that the human person must freely accept if it is to bear fruit.

Pope Francis reminds us that it is imperative for Catholic educators to clearly demonstrate to the next generation that ‘prayer is something truly important’ (AL, 288). The Pope emphasises that moments of prayer and acts of devotion can be ‘more powerful for evangelisation than any catechism class or sermon’ (AL, 288). The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole school family in its evangelical mission. When one considers the work of Catholic educators in this way, the Catholic school, as a family of families, can be seen as ‘an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness’ (AL, 290). As teachers working in Catholic schools, it is important that we take the time to discuss the centrality of faith to our work as Catholic educators with our colleagues during Catholic Schools Week 2018 and to foster an appreciation of the nobility of our evangelical activity as a family of families.

Reflection

Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ (Jn 6:35)

‘We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers.’ (1 Th 2:13)

- The above scriptural references are concerned with the concept of faith. Write a diary entry for one day of the week. Try to account for the various ways in which your activity that day expressed your faith and account for the evangelical impact that your activity exerted on your students or colleagues. Having completed the diary entry, reflect on the concept of faith and the responsibility it carries for your work as a Catholic educator. Could your daily activity have given richer expression to your faith?
- Watch the following video of Pope Francis’ general audience (30 October 2013): www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFY5ugSCz-A (1 min 43 secs). Discuss Pope Francis’ mediation on the journey of faith with other members of staff. From your discussion, discern two ways in which members of staff could create a more welcoming environment for members of the school family to discuss and express their faith.



Prayer

I Believe, Lord

I believe that each of my students is your child.
I believe that they are a reflection of your love.

I believe that each child possesses special gifts and talents,
that you are entrusting me to help them discover these gifts
and nurture those talents.

I believe that each child is trying to find you,
And that I can be a model of how to look,
How to live, how to pray.

I believe that my job is actually a mission, a ministry;
That you have chosen me in this time and in this place
To be there for these kids.

I believe that there is nothing haphazard about my day,
About my experiences with my students or with their parents.
It is all part of your plan.

I believe that you have chosen me, Lord.
I believe.

(Prayer taken from Salesians of Don Bosco Ireland:

www.salesiansireland.ie/prayer-spirituality/everyday-prayers/a-teachers-prayer/*)*