
FIRST TEACHERS

YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS IN YOUR CHILDREN'S LIVES!
JANUARY 2022

Dear fellow parents and guardians, best wishes for a very Happy New Year from the Diocesan Commission for Family Life. The end of the Christmas holidays is always a bit sad but at least the children go back to school!



Bishop John recently spoke about the complementary roles of home, parish and school at the inaugural meeting of our Diocesan parent council. He explained that the Rite of Baptism encourages parents to be the first and best teachers in the ways of faith. The role of schools and teachers, parishes and priests is to work in partnership with parents to assist them in doing so. He illustrated this partnership as a three-legged stool, with each leg being essential for the stool to fulfil its function. It's easy to see what happens if one leg is missing!! He also reminded us that Mary and Joseph shared the worries of all parents when Jesus had stayed behind in the Temple while they had set off home. However, Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, "where he was obedient to them.... (and) grew both in body and wisdom." (Luke 2: 41-51).

Home, Parish and School: united in the service of our children

Since starting to work with the Diocesan Education Office last Spring, we have become more aware of just how much is done to help our children learn and live their faith. Preparing our children to receive the sacraments of initiation is a significant responsibility carried out with enthusiasm and dedication by primary schools and clergy. In addition to this, alongside formal R.E. classes, there are many other opportunities to practise our faith including Masses, assemblies, prayer services and retreats, the Pope Francis and Caritas awards schemes and many student groups focused on faith and charity. Our Catholic charities such as [SCIAF](#) and [Mary's Meals](#), [ACN](#) and [Missio](#), [SPUC](#), [Life](#), etc. provide awareness of and opportunities to practise solidarity with those who are impoverished, marginalised or denied their fundamental human rights.



Our school chaplains (in addition to their many other duties as our Priests and Deacons) are a frequent and encouraging presence in our schools, offering the witness of a life lived in the service of God for others. Many schools now offer [NET](#) retreats, which provide a powerful opportunity to experience God's

personal love. Our [Diocesan Education Office](#) works closely with schools to provide educational and spiritual resources, support and training for teaching staff.



Our parishes, as well as being at the core of our Catholic life in celebration of the sacraments together, provide many other opportunities for our young people to be formed and encouraged in faith and service to others. These include different types of youth groups as well as the Children's liturgies provided by dedicated volunteers. The [Diocesan Youth Office](#) organises many retreats, masses and other activities based around annual pilgrimages to WYD and Lourdes. We can be justly proud and grateful for so much dedicated effort aimed at our children's growth in faith and character, love and respect for others.

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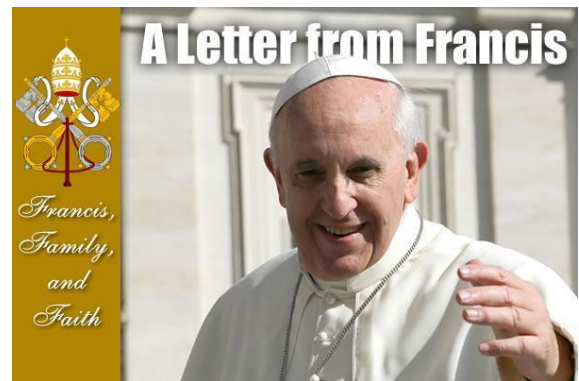
We know from our own experience, as well as scientific studies, that the impact of these opportunities is greatly



magnified by our efforts as parents and guardians to help our children practise and develop their faith. The Holy Family provides a model for parents as the first teachers of their children; it is sometimes (or maybe lots of the time) very challenging, but always worth it. Let's keep our leg of the stool in place, even if it's a bit wobbly at times, and support our children towards all the blessings and advantages that come from a mature and well-founded faith.

Pope Francis' letter to families

Pope Francis recently published a letter to all families as part of the special year for the family focused on His Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love). In this letter, [available here](#), he describes parents and spouses steering their boat like the apostles through the storms of life. This can be tough and frightening, but he reminds us that Jesus is in the boat with us, especially if we ask Him to help. He can calm the storm and even invite us into those moments (maybe infrequent but very special) where we feel we are walking on water as parents, getting it just right for our children. Maybe we could pray together as a couple or family, asking Jesus to be with us in our wee boat as we plough through the storms and also when enjoying the calm sunny days.



Gospel values in school and at home

Our Catholic schools aim to have Gospel values at their heart, not just in religious education but permeating all teaching and other activities. These values can be described as love, compassion and mercy, justice and integrity, understanding, kindness and gentleness. They are God's route to true happiness, which is surely our goal in life, especially for our children. They are not just a random list of subjective values or ideals, but are expressed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) which are a summary of all Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom and the call to discipleship and *reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts*. Maybe we could reflect on the Beatitudes and how we can nurture these values in our life together as a family?



Lent and Easter

The Season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on 2 March this year, which is later than usual. As this is still a couple of months away we will have another newsletter this term focusing on our preparation for and celebration of Easter, the most important feast in the Church's year. Until then, we pray that all families will experience God's blessing and provision this year, especially that we can grow in faith and love as we journey towards Him together.