

**ANNUAL MASS FOR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STAFF
ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, CARDIFF
THURSDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2013**

Over the last few weeks I have been glued to Channel Four watching a program called “Educating Yorkshire”. It’s about life at Thornhill Academy in the town of Dewsbury, Yorkshire. Some critics have written that the program should be called “Disciplining Dewsbury” as the school struggles with behavioral problems, racial tensions, family breakdown and social and economic deprivation. What shines through is the dedication and commitment of the teachers – even though I can hardly understand their accents!

I wouldn’t want you to think I watch TV all the time, but on I have been watching another program about a comprehensive school on Sky One. It is called “Harrow – a very British school”. And so it is. Before coming to Cardiff, I sometimes had the privilege of confirming some of the 200 Catholic boys who attend Harrow School. Yes, it is privileged in terms of wealth and status and small classes. But it is a comprehensive school too, having to deal with family breakdown, the dangers that all young people have to face, the pressures of keeping 900 demanding boarders occupied for sixteen hours of every day.

Each of us lives in many different worlds. You only have to think of your professional and social lives. We all know of the outer

landscape of our lives and the journeys we make in the inner worlds of our thoughts and feelings, our hopes and our dreams, our fantasies and our failures. All described so well by the psychologist Carl Jung.

Every time we stand in public, whether in front of a class or in front of a congregation, we are in a way fulfilling the theme of today's Mass "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News, make disciples of all the nations". It was way back in 1975 that Pope Paul VI wrote a beautiful letter called "Evangelii Nuntiandi" – Announcing the Gospel. In one of the most striking passages he said "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses". (EN41)

During this "Year of Faith" we have been encouraged to engage in a "New Evangelisation". As you can read in the introduction to Mass, this doesn't mean that we need to learn and share a new Gospel message. The message of Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. What is new are the circumstances in which we try to share it, our own understanding and living of the gospel and the changing social, moral and religious landscape in which we live and educate, not least here in Wales.

Let me give you two examples of that changing landscape. Were you as shocked as I was to read the OECD report recently which

said that the United Kingdom came twenty first out of a league table (terrible words!) of twenty five developed countries in our achievement of numeracy and literacy? And that almost seventy years since the 1944 Education Act. Doubly shocked to find that Welsh pupils on average achieve 11% lower results than their English counterparts? A compounded deprivation.

My second example comes from a think tank which says denominational Religious Education should not be allowed in “Faith Schools”. There should be a presentation of all religions as of equal status and value with no confessional dimension attached to the teaching. You will know that this takes us to the heart and purpose of the Catholic school and the whole Catholic educational endeavour. As I said at the recent conference of Headteachers and Governors we do need to explore here in Wales whether we are providing education for Catholics or a Catholic education for all who wish to avail of it. There are implications for both perspectives, not least with regard to religious literacy and certainly with regard to the practice of the Catholic faith. Is there a critical mass to sustain the Catholicity, the Catholic ethos, gospel values in our schools? When I spoke to the teachers at Bishop Hedley School at their recent In Service day I shared with them teaching of our schools document “Christ at the Centre”. I believe that it is the sine qua non for every teacher, pupil, parent and governor in our schools.

Let Pope Benedict XVI have the last word on the “Good News” at the heart of our special world of caring for the young and their families. He says “...(our youngsters) need to be exposed to love a healthy human ecology, where they come to realise that they have not been cast into the world by chance, but through a gift that is part of God’s loving plan. Parents, educators and community leaders, if they are to be faithful to their own calling, can never renounce their duty to set before children and your people a life project directed towards authentic happiness, one capable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood, good and evil, justice and injustice, the real world and the world of virtual reality”.

The real world. The world of virtual reality. The different world we inhabit. “Go out to the whole world”.

Catholic Social Action Network

- i) To see more clearly what we are doing, to learn and to share that
- ii) To build a working relationship with CSAN for the future

The first initiative will be a research questionnaire which we would ask the schools, parishes, religious orders and charitable groups in the Archdiocese to complete. This will help us to understand the scale and scope of the work locally and enhance the Catholic Church's profile and influence in the 'public square'.

There are leaflets for the schools communities being handed out today which will explain more, and which I encourage you to read. Two representatives from CSAN will join us in the Cornerstone.

The second initiative will be for us to plan a 'roadshow' event in the Archdiocese in 2014 to share this work; renew relationships and build new ones; hear from CSAN what the benefits of joining the Caritas network might be, and what it might look like in the Archdiocese of Cardiff. There will be more news on this later in the year.

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