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A Welcome from the Chair

Happy New Year!

Welcome to the latest bulletin from SCES Parents. I hope Christmas brought you and your family peace and joy and grace.

A new year is a time to make changes and in this issue we would like to invite you to consider changes which can make a positive difference in your school, your home and your heart. Have you made any New Year's resolutions yet? Julie from SCES Parents has some suggestions for spiritual resolutions which will bear fruit in your life. Morag and Kathleen suggest simple changes for a peaceful home and a just world. And Hilary and Jo share how their schools made small changes to develop and support the Catholic ethos.

We hope you enjoy reading the latest issue of SCES Parent News. If you have any comments, or would like to contribute to future issues, please get in touch with us by emailing parents@sces.uk.com

God Bless,
Jo Soares
(Chair, SCES Parents)



On Saturday 18 August, 2018 approximately 20 parents from across Scotland joined the SCES Parents group in St Charles' Parish Hall, Paisley for the annual Gathering of Catholic Parents. The theme was Catholic Schools – Good for Families and speakers included Bishop John Keenan, Jo Hughes RE advisor from SCES and Iain and Gemma Mclean from Families in Faith.

Jo Hughes led our first session and helped us to look more closely at the icon Jesus Our Teacher commissioned for the centenary of Catholic state education. We reflected on its themes and thanked Our Lord for the work of previous generations. We asked Him to bless our children and all currently working for their good in our Catholic schools.

We were privileged next to welcome his grace Bishop John who based his catechesis on the passage in St Luke's Gospel where Our Lady and St Joseph search for the boy Jesus on their way back from Jerusalem.

“Every year they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.” Jesus, Mary and Joseph were a religious family and that is the model which is proposed for us when we bring our children for baptism. The family unit becomes the primary place where children learn and grow as Christians. But Mary and Joseph realised that the nuclear family was not enough for Jesus' formation. They needed to entrust Him to “extended family” and we

must do likewise; our schools and parishes compliment and enrich the learning received at home.

Bishop John went on to highlight how this Gospel passage can exemplify positive interactions in our homes, especially with our adolescents. Jesus is not showing Himself to be an exceptional young person but rather a normal one. He wants to know about God. In other countries in the world and at other times in history young people have sought God. Our young people in 21st century Scotland are no different. They want to know about God and they want us, as their parents, to help them discover Him. We are thus invited to do for our children what Mary and Joseph and their extended family did to prepare Jesus so that they, with the Spirit of God upon them, are ready to bring the Good News to the poor.

Our final session before lunch was a workshop answering the questions children ask.

“Why do we need to go to Mass every Sunday?”

“Why is Good Friday called ‘good’ when so many bad things happen?”

“Did Mary, the Queen of Heaven, wear a crown?”

What would you say? All parents present agreed that answering such questions can be very difficult. Some generated a lot of debate and some a great deal of head scratching! But help is at hand. Here are some excellent publications and websites to explore with children and young people:

- youcat.org – links to the Church’s youth catechism and associated publications
- tweetingwithgod.com – highly recommended for everyone
- Two-minute answers at catholicscomehome.org
- sections aimed at adults, young adults and children
- Bustedhalo.com
- videos and podcasts to appeal to young adults. “You don’t know Jack” is especially recommended.

Lunch was an opportunity to get to meet with other parents and chat informally. A number of Church organisations: Aid to the Church in Need; SCIAF; Net Ministries and St Vincent de Paul Society attended and representatives were on hand to explain how they were able to support families.

After lunch we were delighted to hear from Iain and Gemma Mclean about the work they do with Families in Faith supporting families to live their faith in Paisley. Those present were inspired and humbled by Iain and Gemma’s presentation. There was a general feeling that other areas could copy this model and provide events where it’s ‘okay’ to be a Catholic. Whilst many of us find our primary aged children are happy to come along to Church and Church-related activities it is more of a struggle to continue to engage older children. So it was particularly inspiring to see a large group of teenagers arrive to provide the music ministry for our closing Mass, led by Iain and Gemma. In ‘giving them a job’ Gemma told us that the teenage members of Families in Faith feel valued and included and want to remain part of a supportive group of like-minded friends.

To prepare for Mass Barbara Coupar, director of SCES, took us through “20 things You Didn’t Know You Didn’t Know About Mass.” Again aimed being prepared to answer our children’s questions, Barbara led us in a light-hearted ‘quiz’ on the Mass and provided a reference for explaining Holy Mass to our children. Knowledge refreshed, and with plenty to reflect upon from the day’s input, we gathered in the chapel to conclude our day thanking God through the Eucharist.

What our families said about the day:

“Lots of information and guidance”

“Great hearing from Families in Faith”

“A refreshing, wonderful day”

2019 Parent Gathering:

We look forward to welcoming you to our 2019 Gathering
on **Saturday 14th September** (venue to be confirmed)
which will include activities for the whole family. Save the date!



Help your parent council make positive changes for 2019.

As a member of a parent council you have a vital role in bringing to life the vision, aims and values of your local Catholic school. Your actions can contribute to nurturing the school as a community of faith and learning help to make visible the distinctive nature of our Catholic schools. Take these three easy steps to make a real difference!

1. Pray

Pray for your school and its parent council regularly. If your parent council meetings and events don't already begin in prayer, consider making that change. The meeting prayer from St Andrew's High School, Kirkcaldy asks the blessing of its patron.

Be near us, Father, as we meet today
Inspire our thoughts and light our understanding
Guide us towards your vision for our school
And grant that we may wisely lead
And ever humbly serve
This community of St Andrew's
Entrusted to our care
Amen

As parents you can also join the school community for liturgical celebrations. Try to ensure that the parent council is represented at school Masses. You can engage the wider community too during parish celebrations. Perhaps bidding prayers for the school could be included in Sunday Mass at the beginning and end of each school year?

2. Understand the Charter for Catholic Schools

In standing for election to the parent council, nominees demonstrate their willingness to promote the Charter for Catholic schools and serve the common good. Have copies of the Charter available at the parent council AGM and make sure that all elected representatives have a copy. You can emphasise the commitment representatives are making by issuing the document below which has been produced by the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

Who are the Parent Council and Why are they Important?

The Parent Council of **SCHOOL NAME HERE** Catholic school have a vital role in providing a voice for parents on school issues that are important to them and their children. They are locally-elected representatives of the school community, and they are the community's advocate for Catholic education. A member of the parent council is committed to bringing to life the vision, aims and values of their Catholic school. They participate in nurturing the school as a community of faith and learning. They are active in making decisions that benefit the entire school community, on behalf of the whole parent forum, and taking these decisions back to the rest of the school community.

What do the Parent Council within a Catholic school do?

The parent council of **SCHOOL NAME HERE** Catholic school undertake the same roles and responsibilities as the parent council of a neighbouring school. However, in carrying out these roles they do so as members of a faith community and are aware of the distinctive nature of the school that they have chosen for their child.

Role of the Parent Council: As a member of the parent council of SCHOOL NAME HERE you undertake to be

Witness: The Parent Council support the Mission of their Catholic school and witness to the faith life of the school.

How? Parent Council members are elected from within the parent forum to support the Head Teacher in discharging their role as leader of a faith community. In standing for election of the Parent Council, nominees demonstrate their willingness to promote the Charter for Catholic schools and serve the common good. Through leading and participating in the prayer and liturgical life of the school, the Parent Council witness to the faith life and the agreed vision, aims and values of their Catholic school community.

Facilitator: The Parent Council ensure strong partnerships.

How? The Parent Council work with senior staff and partners to identify and bring together those who can best take forward the priorities of their Catholic school. The Parent Council help the school to understand how to most effectively involve parents in their children's learning and in the life of the school, so as to improve policy or process and ensure active collaboration between home, school and parish.

Advocate: They promote and develop Catholic education with partners and the wider community.

How? Parent Council members are actively involved in the life of the school. They attend parent council and school community meetings and give a voice to their parent forum, thus bringing to life the vision, aims and values of the school, within the school, and to the wider community.

Governance: Parent Councils work with the head teacher to develop and continue to improve effective and transparent decision making for our children, based on the values of Catholic Education.

How? They work with school staff, in partnership with the parish and the local authority to achieve the school's mission and vision. With staff, the parent council reflect and discuss the policies and practices which embed our Gospel values and enable children to succeed, helping to make adjustments and improvements when necessary.

3. Contribute to school improvement.

Every school is engaged in a cycle of self-evaluation and as part of that on-going process, Catholic schools use a document called Developing in Faith to evaluate their faithfulness to the mission of Catholic Education. Parents can make a valuable contribution and, to aid this the SCES Parent group has produced specific parent-centred self-evaluation questions under each of the five themes from developing in faith. Ask your headteacher which theme your school is addressing in 2019 and spend some time reflecting at a parent council meeting. The questions for self-evaluation can be download from the SCES website by following the link:

[Catholic School Developing In Faith](#)

The document for parents at the bottom of the page and is free to download.



New Year Resolutions for All Year

"Resolution- a firm decision to do or not to do something, the quality of being determined or resolute, the action of solving a problem."

Too often people fail or give up because they make unrealistic lists of things they are going to do or change.

Try setting small achievable goals, stay determined for at least a couple of months so that it becomes a habit. This way you are more likely to succeed.

When we do things for others it makes us feel good so committing to make a difference to the lives of others through volunteering or charity might be an idea.

Reflect on things you want to make a fresh start with and ask God to help you.

'With God all things are possible' Matthew 19:26

Try choosing some ideas from the list below that you can relate to. Write each one on a piece of paper and put them in a jar. Take a lucky dip and work on that goal for couple of months then pick another one when you feel ready to do more.

- 1. Each morning ask God to help you and bless your day.**
- 2. Reflect- keep a journal or record something good about each day on a post-it note.**
- 3. Be thankful – help others through volunteering or charity.**
- 4. Prioritise time – take time to be with God and loved ones.**
- 5. Actively listen – less screen / phone time.**
- 6. Eat healthier and drink more water.**
- 7. Be positive- know that failure is part of success.**
- 8. Smile to people and compliment them on something.**
- 9. Pray 3 Hail Mary's for someone just because.**
- 10. Read a bible passage each week with family.**

Blessings and wishes to you all as you enter a new year filled with faith, hope and fun.

Top tips for Families to help our Environment

As a parent we have a responsibility to teach our children to care for our environment. The best way to teach your children to be considerate towards their environment is by showing them how through examples, complete with an explanation about the importance!

First of all, think about pre-cycling. This is about reducing waste by avoiding items that

will generate it or selecting items that will generate less waste. You can apply the pre-cycling principles to your daily shopping practice :

For example,

- Bring your own bags
- Buy goods with the least amount of packaging
- Buy in bulk/concentrated forms

Teach your children how to conserve natural resources :

- Save water - Turn off the taps when brushing teeth

Take shorter showers!

- Teach them how to use a Thermostat – setting a temperature above a certain point wastes energy
- Unplug Appliances that are not being used. Most operate in a standby mode that uses electricity even when not in use eg. Computers, Playstations, X Box!!
- And of course DRIVE LESS! Not only will this reduce carbon emissions, you will save money on fuel costs and it will improve your health and well being!



BLOG SPOT:

**One family's experience of trying to
reduce screen time in their home**



Screen Time, Scream Time – TIME OUT

Screen time? Screen time is a newish concept for some of us parents and grandparents. To others it will be a concept central to our lives, showing every minute of every day with smiles and filters. Exhausting isn't! This piece is not a rescue remedy or 10 easy steps to get your children off their phones. No, this is a mum sharing her challenges and concerns in the hope that together we can take back control of our own homes!

In our home, screen time is becoming a bit of an issue. It's what I call Scream time. When it comes to the amount of time we all spend on our tablets, phones or consoles it is increasingly impacting on our time, our families and dare I say our mood. Coming home from work I am greeted by the breakfast dishes, no homework done and no preparation for dinner. Bins are overflowing, laundry basket is hidden under a wrath of clothing if the clothes make it to the basket at all. I appreciate that our home has never been a Show Home but there is a sense that I am losing control in my home, of my routine, children and TIME.

You may read this and relate to every word. If so it's time to take control back over our own homes! And if you don't, keep doing what you're doing.

Do you ever feel that no one is listening and that 'in a minute' is

becoming too familiar? I can truly say that I am becoming a 'nag' and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do about it because no one is listening. I could take them off their Xbox and their phones but this seems like a punishment and that's not what I want. I just want them to see that there are things that must be done first and being part of a family means sharing the load.

Recently on holidays my sons were either looking for wifi to watch Netflix or downloading some game onto their phones so when they weren't in a Wi-Fi zone they had entertainment. I was delighted with my daughter who seemed anxious to take photos and explore until I realised that my precious family moments were being broadcasted to the world but not before being carefully considered with either a filter or deleted to ensure a perfect pic.

This invasion seemed to be suffocating and its immensity appeared to be overwhelming me. I felt then (and still feel at times) as if we've lost control. Family time, family meals, family prayers are either a thing of the past or rushed in between games or the next 'Bing' of a notification. A 'no phone' at the dinner table was our first step – to start with dinners where very quick with little if no conversation. The request to tidy the dishes was also met with a sense of urgency and anxiety as my sons struggled to stay away from their consoles for any length of time. Talking with my friends and colleagues I was met with a resignation that that is what they're all like but this only increased my fear and my determination to take the control back from the consoles and give it back to my children.

I say this because when I was talking to my sons about my concerns with the amount of time they spent in their room playing Xbox or play station – Michael suggested that in history this has happened over and over again. Michael proposed that when books became more available to the poor, parents may have been anxious that their children spending too much time reading and not completing their chores or developing skills required for their work. I reflected on this and agreed that if my sons were spending time reading books in their room I may not be so anxious but Michael had a point spending too much time on one thing is never good. The need for balance and priorities is an important skill which I feel we as parents may

be failing to teach our children. The importance of responsibly, of household chores and teaching our children the skill of becoming self-sufficient.

My biggest fear of this invasion is addiction. Addiction, dependency, compulsion or whatever you may like to call it – some people may scoff but the more I thought about it the more convinced I became about the importance of teaching our children moderation. Moderation is not a modern word, in fact society today seems to shun any talk of moderation as it implies self-control or restraint. In this age of fast food and anything goes promoting self-control within the family is becoming more and more difficult as we push against the tide.

This dependency on electronics which has been well documented with regards to the effect on a person's mood and behaviours however the elephant in the room is the lack of self-control that unlimited use encourages. Food, alcohol, sex are all adult issues which many people struggle with. However imagine if you have never been taught self-awareness, the importance of prioritising, fulfilling responsibilities before fulfilling your own wishes or desires.

How are our children going to regulate their own behaviour and become responsible people and good parents if we don't step up and teach them?

First we need to get off our phones ourselves. (It is harder than you may think.)

You could write a list of things you want to achieve in the day and encourage your children to do the same.

Matching homework time with screen time was an eye opener for my sons because no way were they going to put that amount of time into their school work.

What it did however was let them appreciate the amount of time spent on their consoles and what they could achieve with

that time.

Some friends do not allow console Monday to Thursday which worked really well for their family. I also read about a lady who was so fed up with not spending time with her son that she began to play the console with him. This would definitely not be a remedy for me but I admire her determination to reconnect.

There are many other ways to help ourselves and our children. Getting our children to understand the balance of life and electronic devices in itself is not bad and should be in enjoyed at the right time.

We are still very much in the transition period of this lifestyle change which will be ongoing. The main difficulty, which my husband and I find, is having enough energy to encourage them to undertake other activities because if they are in their room they're safe and out of our way. Trying to keep positive and not criticise their attempts to load the dish washer or the mixing of colours in the washing machine. I also found that I would do things myself because it was quicker than asking them repeatedly however it is a false use of time.

So it's onwards and upwards – keep praying for the guidance and patience to keep going because it is our children's future wellbeing and mental health that we are nurturing. Even if they don't know it yet!

Chaplaincy in a Catholic school through the eyes of a parent

The spirit and ethos of our Catholic schools is enhanced by our Chaplaincy team who work closely together helping the school too develop our young people in their Faith. This is a positive experience promoting the Catholic Ethos through prayer, discussion and Mass showing love, respect, good leadership, spiritual guidance, Gospel values.

Having an active school Chaplaincy forges a close link with local parishes and our primary schools. At our recent Caritas Commissioning Mass & breakfast we were joined by family, parishes, head teachers & pupils from all our learning community; a true celebration of our

young people.

Having a faith as a teenager can be difficult and is often seen as "uncool", but leading by example, following Gospel values and encouraging thought and discussion will help young people in their faith development.

Our school chaplain feels that we should encourage them by Faith and Reason:

- Faith - by prayer, look to God in silence, having time for personal prayer, experience personal relationships with God/Jesus.
- Reason - learning about our faith, study our catholic ethos/doctrine, read the bible and catholic books written by Saints.

Our Chaplain has now been with us for three years and feels that his role is about being present in the school community, to pray with teachers and students, to build positive relationships in our school community and, most importantly, to be a real and true witness to his catholic faith/identity.

As a Catholic secondary school Christ should be at the heart of everything we do!



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