

Message from the Chair

Hello!
Welcome to Holy Week and to the spring issue of SCES Parent News.

In our discussions with parents, we found agreement that the great feasts of the Church's year provide a particular opportunity to pass on to our children the practice of the faith. So, in this issue, we have provided a 'ready-to-use' resource for families who would like to observe Holy Week and the Easter Triduum together. In high schools, Easter week also coincides with the beginning of the SQA exam diet and so this time we also hear from a parent who has been supporting her daughter through National Examinations; something which can put strain on many families.

Our 'blog spot' considers fostering good mental health in our children and young people throughout the year and we hear about one school's retreat programme to support the spiritual health of their pupils. We also look forward to the Caritas Award Ceremony on 28th May and hear about the initiative at St Ambrose High School where pupils with additional support needs, attending the special school sharing their campus, can participate in the award as well.

We hope you enjoy reading the latest issue of SCES Parent News. If you have any comments please get in touch with us by emailing parents@sces.uk.com and I wish you a very holy week and a very happy Easter!

God bless,
Jo Soares
Chair SCES Parents



Holy Week in our homes

Grow in Holiness this Holy Week



Lent has been an opportunity to grow closer to God and the culmination of Lent is Holy Week itself. Whatever you and your family have been 'doing for Lent', this week provides a chance to bring into sharper focus the purpose of those acts of penance and charity. At SCES Parents we recognise the need for resources which make the practice of the faith easier to achieve in the midst of modern family life so this year we looked to provide a ready-to-use resource for Holy Week.

For each day this week there is an excerpt from the Gospel to read, together with a brief reflection, prayer and suggestion for action. We hope you will find this a useful resource to make this week Holy for your family. If you have young children you might want to use it for personal reflection but if you have older children or teenagers, why not try to find time each day to read the Gospel excerpt together and reflect on the events of Holy Week which lead us to know Jesus better.

It is also worth remembering that everything we do during Lent, and particularly during Holy Week, points us towards the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Easter is often referred to as "The Feast of Feasts", and the Church asks us to prepare for that by attending the special services of the Triduum: evening mass on Holy Thursday, where we retrace the events of the Last Supper, including the washing of the disciples' feet and the first ever Eucharist; Good Friday, where we recall the Passion, death and burial of Jesus, and kiss the cross, and Holy Saturday's Easter Vigil, the first celebration of the resurrection each year, which is followed by the prayers of Easter Sunday Mass. The Church urges us to mark this special time by attending these services in our parishes.

You can check with your parish to see the times of the services. Some of the services may be long for those with younger children, but many parishes will also hold "family-friendly" versions, designed to help children understand the significance of the events. Try looking at your local parish's bulletin, website or social media platforms to see what would suit your family.

Monday

READ: *Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment.* John 12: 1-3

REFLECT: What a beautiful act of love, and sacrifice. The ointment would have cost a year's salary and thus immediately Mary is decried for wasting money. Jesus refutes this and tells everyone to "Leave her alone." Jesus knew what Mary needed, what each one of us needs – to worship Him and make Him the centre of our lives. We need to humbly serve Jesus not because he needs this but because we need it for our own happiness. We were made for the worship and adoration of God and we do not find fulfilment until we give to the Lord with our whole self and without counting the cost.

PRAY: Jesus I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

ACT: Give your children an example of adoration to copy. Perhaps you could all gather together at teatime or before bed to pray a prayer of adoration together? Or perhaps it would be possible to pop into the church on your way home and spend time with the Blessed Sacrament?

Tuesday

READ: *While at supper with his disciples, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, "I tell you solemnly, one of you will betray me."* John 13: 21

REFLECT: Jesus is showing us his humanity. He was "deeply troubled" – hurt – by Judas' betrayal and saddened at the loss of one he loved. Judas chose to betray Jesus and we have the same choice to make – to accept the loving gift of salvation and grace or to refuse it. We should therefore ask ourselves, "Is Jesus' heart 'deeply troubled' by my actions?" And if the answer is yes that is no reason to despair as Judas did but to turn to Jesus who loves us more than we love ourselves. This will bring peace and consolation to our hearts and peace and consolation to the Heart of Jesus.

PRAY: My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.

ACT: Make a point of saying "Sorry" and "I love you" to each other today.

Wednesday

READ: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. "Take it and eat," he said "this is my body." Then he took the cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them. "Drink all of you from this," he said "for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Matthew 26: 26-28

REFLECT: We hear in Jesus' words, "This is my body given for you." The Holy Eucharist is Jesus' lasting gift to us, given for our holiness and salvation. A gift of complete self-giving and sacrificial love. God Himself is present in our world and as we consume we are transformed into His body and share His divine life. The Eucharist is the culmination of God's actions which sanctify the world and the culmination of our worship of God. We taste heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life.

PRAY: Lord I am not worthy to receive you but only say the words I shall be healed.

ACT: Respond to the invitation to "take this and eat it." Prepare to receive the Eucharist at the Mass of the Lord's Supper tomorrow by making an examination of conscience.

Examination of conscience for children

http://www.johnpaul2center.org/JohnPaulIICenter/LayFormation/AdultFormation/SeasonofMercyFaithFormationRes/10Commandments_Child_EC.pdf

Examination of conscience for teenagers

<http://www.johnpaul2center.org/JohnPaulIICenter/LayFormation/AdultFormation/SeasonofMercyFaithFormationRes/ExaminationofConscienceforYout.pdf>

Thursday

READ: *He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. He got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.*

John 13: 1, 4-5

REFLECT: Jesus presents to us a perfect example of humility and service and calls us to imitate Him. How can we achieve this? It is by receiving the Eucharist that we are given the grace we need to love as He loved us and commit ourselves to humbly serve of others. And this humble service is a beautiful expression of our intimate union with Jesus. As we celebrate Holy Thursday we are challenged to copy Jesus and commit ourselves to a radical and total gift of ourselves to others.

PRAY: Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits Thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.

ACT: Humbly serve your family today and make a conscious preference for each other's needs. Try to attend Holy Thursday mass this evening, and possibly take part in the Washing of the Feet.

Friday

READ: *Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: "I am thirsty." A jar-full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, "It is accomplished;" and bowing his head he gave up the spirit.*
John 19: 28-30

REFLECT: At the point of death Jesus asked for a drink. He was physically thirsty but also he was longing for all the children he loved. Jesus has a deep and burning thirst for our love, for us to return the love He showed in His amazing sacrifice on the cross.

We are used to seeing this sacrifice pictured every time we look at a crucifix but this familiarity can mean we miss what Jesus actually did. Miss the enormity of His suffering and death and fail to comprehend His radical forgiveness for those who injury Him. Recognising Jesus' sacrificial love can enable us to love as He did and love those who hurt us as well as those who love us back.

PRAY: Pray today for all those in need that God the almighty Father may heal the sick, comfort the dying, give safety to travellers, free those unjustly imprisoned and rid the world of falsehood, hunger and disease.

ACT: The Church marks the crucifixion and death of Jesus in a special solemn service usually held at three o'clock. Try to attend this service in your local parish as a family. If that is not possible, turn off distractions (electronic devices, TV, radio, social media...) between noon and 3pm – the hours Jesus hung on the cross – and take time to contemplate His sacrifice for you.

Saturday

READ: *They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden and in this garden was a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was near at hand, they laid Jesus there.*
John 19: 40-42

REFLECT: The Church does not celebrate Mass today. There is silence. Jesus has died and rests in the tomb. This was a day of great sorrow and confusion for those who witnessed Jesus die but it was a day of great joy for the holy souls who had gone before Him. As the apostle's creed tells us, Jesus descended into hell to bring the gift of salvation to all. Holy Saturday can remind us that even the worst of tragedies are not always what they seem and if we hope and trust in God's perfect plan, He transforms lives with His grace and mercy.

PRAY: I put my trust in you and say, "You are my God."
Let your face smile on your servant, save me in your love.
Psalm 31

ACT: It is the "day of preparation" for the great feast of Easter. Enjoy some 'preparation' by decorating eggs to roll, baking a cake in celebration or arranging spring flowers for the table. In the evening, try to attend the Easter Vigil as a family, and see how the lighting of the fire and the Paschal candle helps us to understand Christ's victory over death and darkness, and the promise of eternal life. The service also allows us all the opportunity to renew our baptismal promises, and to welcome those who are joining our faith community for the first time.

Sunday

READ: *On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, they went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant white clothes suddenly appeared at their side. Terrified, the women lowered their eyes. But the two men said to them, "Why look among the dead for someone that is alive? He is not here; he has risen."*
Luke 24: 1-6

PRAY: He has risen indeed, Alleluia!

Enjoy the celebration! We wish you and your family a very Happy Easter.

A parent's reflection on Holy week

Holy Week – Striking Up A Conversation

What we think about, remember and celebrate on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday / Easter Sunday is the core of what we believe. So it's right that our focus for these days is on coming together to pray and worship. The liturgies that take place in our local parish churches over those days are packed full of richness. One of the best things about these days is that we do different things during mass: wash feet, kiss the cross, have a liturgy of fire and light, renew our baptismal promises. I look forward to these three days in the year and always try to make sure that I am off work on the Thursday and Friday so that I have the time to make the most of what we are celebrating.



These three days are the focus of Holy Week and Lent is the time that we are get ready for this special time. Lent is our time for going out into the desert with Jesus to try and meet God in a more straight forward way. I like that idea of Lent being a time for us to be out in the desert. Not literally! I don't think that I'd survive long in a real desert. What I like is the idea that I can make some changes to de-clutter, make more room for God to come into my life. In Lent we are encouraged to do that through prayer, penance and giving money to the poor. We are going to be ready for the three main days of Holy Week – the Easter Triduum – only if we take the steps to get ourselves ready.

One of the things that I've become conscious of is that for many people the desert is a daily reality. I'm thinking about the elderly living lives that are limited in different ways and often living alone or about those who are unable to engage with each other in a real way because they are so tied up in social media or about those who lack the confidence to meet and be with others. The desert surrounds us and often we carry it deep inside ourselves. It would be good if we were able to find the courage to help each other out of this desert, extend a hand and perhaps, more importantly, an ear to listen to those who are at the margins. It would be good if this Lent and Holy Week we commit ourselves to have conversations with everyone in our families, to waste a bit of time with them listening to them and making or deepening our connections with each other. Sometimes it is enough to make the effort to have a conversation; I know that with teenage children it can be difficult to find ways to engage, but they do know when we are making the effort, they do appreciate when we don't give up on them, they do understand that we are trying to reach them. As my parish priest recently put it, "When you are struggling, you're winning"!

Helping each other to deepen the bonds that tie us together, having conversations about things that are important to us, spending time listening and appreciating each other would be good preparation indeed to meet God himself in a deeper way.

Tony

Tony Coultas is a father to grown up children and a supporter of Catholic education in Scotland. He chaired the SCES Parent Involvement Working Group from 2011 to 2016.



Parent's Blog 1: Being mum, even during anxious times

"They say life can't prepare you for having children but I have to say I was very lucky through the early years. It was a pleasure. Both girls were easy going and chilled out, mostly nursing, sleeping or smiling.

During the middle years they developed unique personalities and personalities quite opposite; one feisty and the other laid back. Although they were challenging times, they were still great girls. They loved their mum, needed me and were proud of me.

Then all of a sudden it happens, they wake up one morning a grumpy teenager. No warning and no instructions come with them.

These teens eat junk, sleep a lot and moan. I find myself constantly asking them to pick up your laundry, eat your tea, do your homework, who used all the towels, shampoo, shower gel and conditioner..? have your shower earlier, get off your phone tidy your room... wake up, pick up your laundry and don't miss the bus, no you can't go... get a job, where who's and what time..? help around the house, don't wear so much make up... the list goes on.....



I try to remain calm but then it seems they are walking all over you and if I shout, they say 'well there's no need to shout about it!' Add to this a child with anxiety. It can sometimes feel like I'm being tested to the limit.

The anxiety has been my biggest challenge. Learning to understand and cope with little rituals. The senior years at school have been a constant source of stress for my daughter. Exams, friendships, part-time jobs, they all take their toll and this stress manifests itself in deteriorating behaviour. I have to accept that no amount of nagging will help. In fact, I need to step back and accept that some things may not go to plan this year but there *is* always next year. Our children may feel a particular problem is the end of their world but if from further away, we might see the alternative path.

This Lent our family has been reflecting on the Stations of the Cross together. This has helped us to focus on our faith, think of others and put our needs in the hand of the Lord. It hasn't removed the stress of impending exams but it has allowed us all to cope better.

I live in hope that they will grow out of this phase soon. Until then I try my hardest to be a loving role model with faith in the knowledge that the Lord will enlighten me and guide me day by day blessing us on this journey to adulthood together.

Julie

(Julie is the mother of two girls aged 15 and 17)

Parent's Blog 2: How School Retreats help our children's mental health



Over the last nine years, I have been fortunate enough to have had an active involvement in our S1 & S2 retreats.

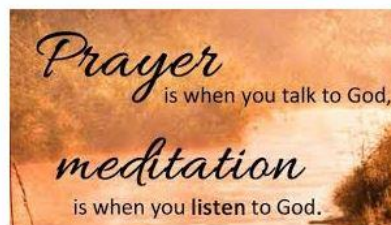
The pupils don't always see all of the preparations that go into making the retreats happen, and don't always see straight away the benefits that praying and meditating together bring, but as a parent looking in, I can see that what a vital part of the life of a Catholic school these retreats are.

Over this time, I have had the opportunity to watch the different first year classes grow as new friendships are formed and dynamics are worked out. I have been privileged enough to hear their tales about getting lost in their first few days of secondary school, their experiences and thoughts about moving to secondary school and the differences from primary school, especially being the youngest again!

The retreat gives them the space to get to know each other in a safe environment, where they can work in groups, get to know people they wouldn't normally work with and build positive, prayerful relationships. On the surface it may seem like an exercise in simply getting the first years settled in to school, but seeing the transformation that the retreats make, I know that there is something 'more' at work.

Spending time with the second years on retreat, listening to their thoughts and anxieties about the future and hearing their dreams and ambitions, has been wonderful. In particular, I always enjoy hearing about and discussing the subjects they are considering choosing and who has helped influence their decisions. The retreats offer the second years an opportunity to escape the pressure of school for a day and really think about and discuss all their options in stress free and peaceful environment.

This year I have thoroughly enjoyed spending time with our first and second year pupils. They have all had great fun escaping a busy high school and spending time together in a different environment. It has been a pleasure to see them encouraging and supporting each other.



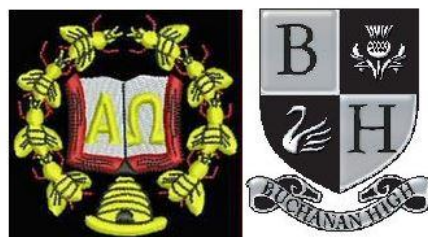
At a time where mindfulness and positive mental health are being promoted in schools and work places, I think it is important to know that our school retreats are building more than just the self awareness that mindfulness brings, but teaching our children how to be aware of themselves, their relationship with God and others, what brings true happiness and how prayer helps us cope at times of stress and anxiety.

I hope I can continue to partake in this vital aspect of our school community.

Hilary

Parent's Blog 3: Partnership schools - Faith life across a shared campus

In our final blog for this newsletter, Kathleen shares how St. Ambrose High School has been working in partnership with their neighbours Buchanan High and Townhead community centre to support the faith life of pupils on campus:



St Ambrose HS and Buchanan HS Coatbridge.

The school campus of St Ambrose is fairly new, having been opened in November 2012. It is located in Coatbridge and sits alongside Buchanan High School and Townhead Community Centre.

Buchanan High is a non-denominational school that caters for children with a range of additional support needs, aged 12-18. The current school roll is 121. St Ambrose and Buchanan High have strong links and are building a real sense of community in the local area. The schools promote activities which foster inclusion and opportunities to share information, resources and good practice. Senior pupils from St Ambrose volunteer in Buchanan eg supporting their Burns Supper event, and both schools come together for joint fundraising events , notably the Christmas Fayre.

Last year the two schools worked together to help pupils who wanted to, complete the Caritas award. Although only 1 pupil from Buchanan High undertook Caritas last year, both schools felt this worked well, regular meetings ensured that the same information was shared among all the candidates, prayers, volunteering opportunities, and the booklet has been adapted for Buchanan pupils. It is hoped that in the coming years more of the pupils from Buchanan will be presented for the award through St Ambrose.

This term there are 30 pupils at Buchanan High who are Roman Catholic and the school communities work hard to ensure that they are able to take part in the faith life of St Ambrose as often as they want to. There are joint masses in St Ambrose each week and on Holy days, pupils from both schools participate, and one of the Buchanan pupils is the Sacristan for the Oratory.

Fr Kane is Chaplain to both schools and now that there is Catholic provision in the ASN sector there is much greater scope for Catholic chaplaincy. The result of this will be more class visits, a visit from the Bishop and an increase in Catholic RE. So exciting times ahead!

Kathleen