Together in Lent

SCES Parents' Newsletter
February 2020

Hello!
Welcome to the latest bulletin from SCES Parents. Spring has not quite sprung but we are looking forward to the renewal the coming season will bring and, as we begin Lent ,we invite you to consider small changes to your family life which can enrich it with grace and also impact the lives of those in our community and around the world who are most vulnerable.

In this issue we hear too from St Ambrose, Coatbridge where pupils' charitable work is not only making a real difference to the lives of disadvantaged groups but is a rich learning experience led by the pupils themselves. We consider how the Rights Respecting Schools Award may be used to deliver part of the RERC curriculum and we have parent's perspective on the Health and Relationships education taught in our Catholic schools. Finally, a retiring member of SCES parents shares her feelings as her children leave school and move on with the next stage in their lives.

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)

Lent 2020

Reflect on your family or community for a short while and you are almost bound to note you are facing many challenges. Lent is the perfect time and the home is the perfect place to receive the grace we need to meet these challenges and live a more authentic life of Christian witness. Our homes are where we are busy and where we rest, where we hope and where we worry and where we love and we forgive. 26th February, 2020 is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The word "Lent" is from the Old English lencten which simply means spring, signifying new life and renewal. The Church encourages us to renew our relationship with God and with others with prayer, fasting (or giving up unnecessary luxuries) and giving to others. You may think of Lent as season of self-sacrifice but it's also a chance to do good.

Things You Can Do for Lent as a Family

If you don't want to give something up for the Lenten season, why not do something as a family instead? It doesn't have to be big or grand. In fact, it's often the small things that make a difference.

1. **Daily Family Devotions** Whether it's at breakfast or after dinner, you can read a reflection with your family. It need not be long or dramatic https://mycatholic.life/daily-reflections/ is excellent and https://teachingcatholickids.com is helpful for families with small children.
2. **Daily Prayer Time** It's important that kids grow up feeling that prayer is a natural thing. Each evening spend time in prayer for something important to your family (*e.g.* the health of loved ones, members of your community, stewardship of our world). SCES Parents resources page has downloadable leaflets on praying with primary or secondary-aged children https://sces.org.uk/resources-for-parents/ .
3. **Find Something to Give Away** As a family, go through your possessions and find gently used items that can be passed on to someone who needs them. Toys, clothes or baby gear are always much appreciated.
4. **Encourage One Another Daily** At a mealtime together, go around the table and take turns saying something nice or encouraging for each person present. Not just compliments like "has cool shoes" but work to build each person up.
5. **Be hospitable** Each week in Lent, why not invite over another individual or family with whom you aren't well acquainted? Someone new in town, an older single person who might enjoy fellowship or an elderly couple whose grandchildren are far away. Enjoy time together and build relationships.
6. **Reach out to someone else** Whether by text, email, or handwritten card, choose a person today and send them a line or two of encouragement. An "*I'm thinking of you*" or "*we're praying for you*" can mean more than you think.

More ideas on page 10-12

Lent: Almsgiving from a parent's perspective

As a parent of children at St Ambrose HS I know how committed the teachers and pupils are to promoting Gospel values and good citizenship. Like a lot of schools, one of the many ways this is done is through our charitable work.

Throughout the year, and especially at Lent the school is a hive of activity with many fundraising initiatives. From Bake sales to wear something red for Aid to the Church In Need to sponsored walks. Not forgetting the annual trek by our S1 pupils up Tinto Hill, last year St Andrews Hospice were presented with a cheque for over £2000!

It is great to know that, as well as whole school events our pupils have the autonomy and responsibility to select their own charities, which in turn means they are more engaged in developing their own ideas around charitable giving, and they are encouraged to research areas of interest to them.

The school house system encourages pupils to work across different year groups to focus on almsgiving, with each of the 3 Houses having identified a chosen charity to support.

Skye House – SCIAF
Tay House – St Andrews Hospice
Forth House – Glasgow Children's Hospital

As a faith community we are aware of how fortunate we are in comparison to so many people around the world, so, not only does the school support local and national causes, but also International. We have strong links with Malawi and the Association of People with Disability in Bangalore. A group of senior pupils will visit Malawi this summer and they have worked tirelessly to raise funds to visit our partner school.

Local community links are strong with a recent focus on partnering with our Coatbridge Foodbank, where regular donations are collected and delivered.

As a parent, I am grateful that the children are learning about their responsibility for others and that, over and above all of the great work above, pupils also have the opportunity to nominate a charity close to their heart. In recent years just some of the charities that have been of great importance to pupils, teachers and parents are MND, Aid to the Church in Need, Marys Meals and Alzheimers Scotland. This is such an important part of how we give our children a greater understanding of culture, disability and broadens our children's understanding of our Christian duty to love others as ourselves.

Looking back, looking forward: An honest mum from an empty nest

It only seems like yesterday that I seemed confined to the couch breastfeeding and gazing, deeply in love into the eyes of my new baby girl.

How amazing it was that I gave birth to this beautiful little life. She was so vulnerable and now I had to protect her until she was all grown up!

That day would be so far away I thought, yet here I am reflecting on the past 18 years already. Time truly does fly by.

I never actually thought I'd miss breastfeeding constantly, sleepless nights and my sling which had become part of my daily outfit. Baby groups, toilet training, temper tantrums, the list goes on..... .exhausted and then as if it's not all tiring enough we choose to add another bundle of joy to the family.

Older one finally starts nursery, time to catch up on jobs if the baby will sleep! Then eventually they are both at school so surely it must get easier but no, homework, play dates, parties, dancing, swimming, Parent Council duties. Juggle, juggle, juggle!!!

And then blink, they're now at secondary school - a whole new world in this tech age, your lovely little angel becomes a moody, hormonal wreck with attitude. I went from being their most loved person in the world to the worst mother ever! Mobile phone battles, home work and exam stress, friends drama, worrying about their whereabouts all the time, wishing they were babies again.

It's so tough just wanting them to be safe and happy and study a wee bit!
All this seemed to pass in a flash. Cherish every moment they say. I tried to remember that but still now I find myself staring into their empty beds where I once tucked them in, read stories, chatted and said their prayers. This was the first time I cried, this has been the hardest transition for me to cope with - wishing I could rewind time and slow down every day.

So, as I reflect on the craziness and wonderfully happy times too of their childhood, I know that I am so blessed to have been given two precious miracles who have brought our family so much joy. We made it through the tough times thanks to God who always guided me. I'm thankful for my gift of Faith. It is true God never gives you more than you can handle. Difficult times make you stronger and appreciative. I have the privilege of health to share my love and wisdom with my now young ladies.

I await with excitement what their futures will bring but certainly not wishing it away! I've learned to embrace the moment, cuddle them everyday or message them when they're away. Hoping and praying that God will guide them as he has done for me.

I hope that they will remain strong in their faith, keeping Jesus in their hearts and that I can continue to be a good example of a mother for them.

I have to remember that it is the falls that make us get up again stronger and though it is hard to watch your children struggle in life knowing that God has a plan for us and that every thing happens for a reason helps me to believe that all will be ok.

I know that my empty nest will be full again one day and that may not be so far off! Meanwhile I'll enjoy the silence and recharge my batteries for the next chapter in my life.
Julie xx

“Catholic School! Good Plan!”
A parent’s thoughts on why their choice of Catholic education is about more than exam results

The choice

There are many reasons why as parents we chose the faith sector to educate our 4 children. When our eldest daughter started school, we were naïve to the importance of our choice. Was it because we went to Catholic School ourselves or was it because it taught a faith which we loved and wanted our children to cherish too?

To be honest both ring true but imagine my joy when through my exposure to the true nature of Catholic Education that I became aware that my child was growing and learning in a Blessed and Holy environment where Christ was present in a very apparent and vibrant way.

One of the most important aspect to us was that within the Catholic School Sector was that parents are recognized as the First Educators of their children. This relationship between the family and school, together with the Church places a pathway of equanimity and an openness to conversation to discern our children’s spiritual wellbeing not just their academic progress. School should not just be about the academic or the formation of citizens but a connection to the spiritual being. I remember the first time thinking of my children as spiritual beings. It’s difficult to imagine that this is how our teachers are viewing our Primary One as they struggle with their shoes and coats. However, that love shown for God’s creation, age 5, is what underpin our Catholic education system.

Panic!!!

As our children grew, they developed their own personalities and we became increasingly aware of the outside influences from their friends, staff, media and social media. And we knew we needed a plan…. God’s Loving Plan.

I feel some level of control within our home even if this at times does get a bit overwhelming. My anxieties however increased when my little ones walked through those school gate. I began to struggle with the inevitability of the world and questioned how I could balance the exposure to this world that my child would experience. I soon realized that at the heart of preparing them was reminding myself that they are God’s creation and teaching them to live in a loving relationship with Him and others.

Not an easy task for anyone!

Then I was introduced to God’s Loving Plan in our primary school. This is the name given to the work our children do on relationships. The programme’s ethos embraces our children across their whole school life. My own experience of the programme was that it encompasses the Church’s teachings in a comprehensive, inclusive way which carefully cradles our young children in a loving sensitive manner in line with their developmental understanding, whilst supporting our them to grow in compassion and good judgement.

It not easy, but then again; it's not supposed to be!

Schools are very much more than a place to impart an education, it's a life effecting experience which can frame our thinking for the rest of our lives. Knowing that my children's school's charter places the family at its heart and knowing that this framework of teaching and influencer is God's Loving Plan allows me to leave my children happy in what I believe to be and extension to our home.

As the first educators of our children we recognize the partnership between the educating experts in our schools, and how they are supported by the Church and ourselves as parents- the experts in our child's wellbeing and spiritual development. However, like the world our schools are made up of all different families with different belief systems which gives our children an essential exposure to the reality of the world and teaches them the importance of respect, dignity and tolerance. I have found that religious education must therefore be able to teach, guide and support all our children, giving love, hope and clarity in the way of Christ. To give a safe space for children to be a child and know how to live in the world without necessarily being of the world. I saw this equilibrium carefully delivered by our teachers who, without judgement and with an inclusive nature, nurtured our children in the continuation of their spiritual education. As with all good education the needs of the child are at the centre and I found God's Loving Plan allowed a compassionate outreach at the child's level and understanding. In talking to other parents I appreciate at times some parents may feel that the teaching has not gone far enough, whilst other families believe that the teaching is beyond what they think their child needs. However, our family found that the programme was fluid enough to meet the different needs of each of our 4 children and that the learning was inclusive of the wide nature of our faith community and helped to teach children and families about the mercy of Christ.

As part of the SCES parent group I have personally read and given feedback on other resources which the government has commissioned for schools and, although some of the content is educational, it seems to focus only on the individual and on the sexual health of a person/child. These other resources see the person as a sexual being and not a spiritual being. God's Loving Plan (primary) and Called for Love (secondary) were written with love and a commitment to the child to support and guide them in a community of love, friendships and relationships as well as appreciating of their place and responsibilities in the world. Celebrating their God given talents and their true Godly worth, what more would I want for my child?

For more information on the Health and Relationships programmes taught in Catholic schools visit the Scottish Catholic Education Service website https://sces.org.uk/health-relationships/
A guide to God's Loving Plan for parents is also available to download from the resources page https://sces.org.uk/resources-for-parents/

The UNICEF Rights Resecting Schools Award – Your Questions Answered

As Scottish Government plan to introduce new legislation that makes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we answer some questions raised by parents on the Rights Respecting School Award

What is the Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)?
RRSA is a scheme run by UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) which aims to help schools embed the main points of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e. the values of respect and nurture for human persons, into daily school life.

Many local schools seem to be working on the award just now. Why is that?
In the coming year the Scottish Government intends to introduce a bill to incorporate fully the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law. This convention has been ratified by the majority of the countries on the UN General Assembly, including the Holy See.
Every public body, including schools, will be affected by the bill and so the Scottish Government is developing a plan which includes engagement by young people themselves. RRSA is one way that young people in schools can engage with learning about their rights.

Is the award necessary for all schools?
Our Catholic schools have a clear statement of their mission and ethos set out in the Charter for Catholic Schools which includes, "a commitment to the integrated education and formation of the whole person" and "an inclusive ethos which aims to honour the life, dignity and voice of each person, made in the image of God" and so much of the work your child's school is already doing will be supporting the underlying aims of RRSA. However, your headteacher may have decided that the aims of the award dovetail well with the vision and values of the school and feel that engaging with the award provides a structure, motivator and practical resources for furthering these aims.

I don't support all of UNICEF's campaigns. Should I be concerned?
Members of the Catholic community cannot, in good conscience, endorse any policy which contradicts with Catholic teaching and for this reason it is unlikely that Catholic schools would be involved in fundraising activities, for example. But, where there is no conflict, Catholic schools can work with UNICEF towards shared values.

My daughter says they are doing Rights Respecting work in RE time. Is this replacing RE?
In his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII said, "The ultimate source of human rights is found in man himself and in God his Creator". Some of the RRSA relates to the Church's social teaching which is an important part of the RE curriculum but does not cover it all. Any learning about RRSA within RE will be carefully planned by the teacher. Over the course of the school year your child will continue learning across all of the strands which make up the This Is Our Faith programme. The learning your daughter is engaged in may begin with discussions of her human rights but will not stop there as lessons will continue with discussions of the source of those rights and the very nature of God as our Creator.

What should I do if I have questions?
As always, if you have any questions about your child's time in school you should contact your headteacher.

Lenten Activities for Families

Monday *Care for our Common Home*	Tuesday *Reflect on scripture*	Wednesday *Give to others*	Thursday *Pray for others*	Friday *Fast*	Saturday *Grow together as a family*	Sunday *Be thankful*
		Ash Wednesday Put a small donation daily into your SCIAF wee box.	Pray for those who do not know Jesus that they may learn about his love.	Give up television, video games or social media for the day.	Visit a friend or relative who doesn't get many visitors.	Go outside and look around you. Thank God for his beautiful creation.
Plan a simple meal and talk as a family about how to help the hungry.	Re-read Sunday's Gospel and share your reflections with one another.	Donate a bag of food to the local foodbank.	Pray for someone who has been unkind to you.	Give up sweets and snacks today.	Surprise your family by doing something helpful you wouldn't usually do.	At dinner tonight ask everyone to share what they are grateful for.
Review your energy use. Could you make savings or could you swap to a 'green' supplier?	Read the Gospel for the day.	Take a bag of clothes that are still nice but that you no longer wear to a charity shop.	Memorise a prayer that you don't already know by heart.	Make a simple meal from store cupboard basics.	Pray the Rosary (or even just a decade) as a family.	Light a candle at church and pray for someone you love.
Have a meatless day.	Choose a psalm and pray it together.	Make a card for someone you know who is having a hard time.	Pray for friends and family who are preparing to receive sacraments.	Buy nothing today.	Go for a walk with your family.	Thank each other for the special gifts they bring to the family.
Sort your recycling carefully and minimise your waste.	Listen to religious music whilst you do a task you have been putting off.	Take time to share a smile with someone today.	Pray for the Pope and for Bishops, Priests and Deacons.	Pack 'leftovers' for your lunch.	Tell your parents you appreciate them.	Clear your mind of other things and sit quietly with God.
Adapt one of your family's favourite recipes so that it uses less meat.	Attend (or read at home) the Stations of the Cross.	Pray for the homeless and find out about a charity which supports them.	**Holy Thursday** Try to attend Mass this evening where we re-trace the events of the last supper.	**Good Friday** The Church solemnly commemorates the Passion at 3pm. Try to attend or take time for contemplation around this hour.	Decorate eggs to roll on Easter Day.	**Happy Easter!** Celebrate the feast .

Or you and your family can enjoy a Holy Lenten season with simple daily activities incorporating prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Here are some additional websites with ideas for the Season of Lent at home:

Lent at Home

SCIAF

8 ways to prayer during Lent

Southwark Archdiocese Resources

National Catholic Education Association Resources

CAFOD

WAYS TO DO LENT

Try one of these practices each day during Lent.

Feed the birds Do a chore without being asked Read a book for fun Enjoy some time alone Fast from junk food Write in a journal for fifteen minutes Go to Mass Donate foods you like to eat to a food shelf

Walk a pet for a friend Close your eyes and listen Sing at the top of your lungs Try a new food or restaurant Write a letter to God Pray Psalm 19 Write a poem called "Spring" Compliment a parent Keep the TV turned off for a week Make the Stations of the Cross Buy or plant a flower and care for it Listen closely at Mass Play cards with the old folks at a nursing home Go for a walk Draw a symbol of the resurrection Offer to babysit for free (on a Friday night) Clean your closet and give away forgotten clothes Visit a grandparent Walk instead of ride Tell a child a story Try not to use the internet for a day Daydream about your future Ask a relative to tell a story about when they were your age Pray the Rosary Get some exercise Give away toys you have outgrown Make a new friend Put your phone away for a whole day Make peace with an enemy Find eight signs of new life in nature Laugh Attend a service during Holy Week

SCOTTISH CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE