

10<sup>th</sup> December 2009

***Letter to The Head Teacher and Staff of Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese, from the Archbishop***

Dear Friends,

I want in a very special way to greet you at Christmas, to thank you for the tremendous contribution you make to the education and formation of our young people, and in that way also to the mission of the Church, which, "expert in humanity" seeks the good of all mankind. Your role is an indispensable one in this regard.

The Catholic school in which you work, and to whose purpose you are dedicated, seeks the holistic development of young people, and seeks therefore to nurture also that which is deepest in our make-up, namely the religious sense. The late Pope Paul VI, while still Archbishop of Milan, wrote a beautiful pastoral letter on the "religious sense", pointing out that we all have this to a larger and lesser degree, and that it can be particularly evident in young children.

Religion in that respect is not a construct, or an imposition, but truly a constituent aspect of humanity which education, as the word itself suggests, draws out. While Religious Education as a specific subject in the school is necessary, and requires expertise of a high order on the part of the teacher, the Catholic school looks to the development of what we call a religious "ethos", the expression which we find difficult to explain in a sentence, but which is nonetheless a reality in our schools and has been repeatedly remarked upon by Her Majesty's Inspectors. They have recognised it as a nurturing environment, with significant benefits across the whole curriculum of learning and as conducive to, and reflective of, a sense of community, even of family. In my recent, for me very memorable, visits to schools in the Archdiocese I have come away with a strong sense of that family feeling and the pride that so many of our young people have in belonging to their respective schools and wearing their school badges.

Every year, on the Feast of the Holy Family, we read in the Divine Office an extract from a beautiful address given by Paul VI as Pope (5<sup>th</sup> January 1964). It seems appropriate in the context of Christmas, and in front of the cribs which mark the decoration of our schools at this season, to share a few quotations from it with you:

*"The home at Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus – the school of the Gospel".*

*The first lesson we learn here is to look, to listen, to meditate and penetrate the meaning – at once so deep and so mysterious of this very simple, very humble and very beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Perhaps we learn, even imperceptibly, the lesson of imitation.*

*Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ.*

*How gladly would I become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and a higher wisdom of divine truths".*

In so far as your school reflects the family, in terms of that love and care for one another which every family should nurture, and which finds its prime example in the family of Nazareth, it will not only provide outstanding service in educational terms, but will also give you immense personal satisfaction – joy in the Lord!

This is my hope and prayer for you this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

✠ Mario Conti  
Archbishop of Glasgow

*I would be grateful if this letter could be copied and given to every member of staff with my warmest Christmas Greetings.*