

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



PASTORAL LETTER for DIOCESAN EDUCATION SUNDAY

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In his teaching in the Gospel, Jesus uses images relating to a vineyard, as he does today. To produce good fruit, vines need tending with loving care. Jesus is our vinedresser, our good shepherd, our teacher.

The Church, you and I, share in that work of Jesus. Today and during the coming week in our Diocese, we are focussing on the work of teaching and education, in particular, in our Catholic Schools.

There are rural areas in the Diocese where there are no Catholic Schools, but I want us to celebrate our 47 Schools serving 20, 000 children and young people around the Diocese. During this Education Week, there is the opportunity to thank God for what is a vast enterprise, providing privileged places in today's society. For in our schools we can speak openly about Jesus and his Gospel, and about the Church in a world that seems to be keeping religion and especially the Christian faith at a distance.

The concentration on standards, targets and rigour is vital but the framework in which teaching and learning take place is equally important. The Catholic School provides the environment for learning how to live and how to become mature men and women with big hearts. The Catholic School not only broadens our intellectual dimension but also helps us to grow in faith so that we can experience more fully two fundamental values of freedom and service. A Catholic education must help us to reflect on who we are and what we do, and to know how to evaluate which behaviours make us grow. It should help us to exercise our freedom to choose the good however challenging. It should help us to be people with a backbone, who know how to face life and make the right choices.

In the area of service, the life and activity of our schools should prepare us not to be wrapped up in ourselves but to open ourselves to others, and especially to the poorest and most in need. That is a response to the call of Jesus Christ. We have to learn to listen to that call in our prayer and in our everyday routine.

In this Education Week, I want to encourage parents, the first teachers of children in the ways of faith. Being a parent brings many challenges as you see your children move towards adulthood, but you will be surprised how your children in later life reflect your values.

Our Catholic Schools are there to work in partnership with home and parish in a much broader and diverse way than when they were first built. We owe a great debt to all those who established, built and funded our schools in those early days. Some came through the dedication of religious orders and others through the commitment of priests and people in our parishes.

Now, in a time of constant change in education, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to the staff and governors of our schools for their dedication and commitment in the face of so many challenges. Without their generous service, our young people would not be able to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities in our schools. I also want to thank the staff of NORES, the Northampton Diocese Religious Education Service, who do so much in support of our schools.

In a way our schools are like vineyards producing not grapes but rounded young people. The tending of our schools needs to be thoroughly professional and imbued with faith, hope and love.

So, this week I ask you to remember our schools in your prayers, our young people and their families, and all staff and governors. Pray that our schools may be places where students can flourish, coming closer to Jesus and being strengthened to live the values of the Gospel as members of the Church. I do enjoy visiting our schools, and I rejoice at the great contribution our young people make to the whole of society and to the good of the world God has created. Thanks be to God!

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name "Peter".

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, 4/5 October 2014*