

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland – Conference Address

Driving down the road from Armagh for today's conference brought me back to my own days as a school principal. As I remember it, being away from school for a few days at a conference like this brought with it a whole mixture of relief, anxiety, excitement and trepidation! How would they manage without the principal and deputy? Will the building fall down and the whole operation descend into chaos? Needless to say, they were well able to get on without us!

One of the most fulfilling things about conferences such as this is the opportunity to meet with other school leaders and governors, to reflect for a while and take stock, and to do so in a relaxed atmosphere away from the endless 'plate-spinning' that so often sums up our life; to enjoy the company of others like ourselves; to drill down deep and to ask ourselves the question: what are we all about, anyway? Life as a school leader can be so frantic at times that we can easily forget our why it is that we answered the call to teach in the first place.

It's a great honour for me to be invited to address your Conference. It's my first time to meet formally with the CEIST 'community'. At the outset I want to say thanks to you all - thanks for saying 'Yes' to the call to become a teacher or governor and in due course to become a school leader. Thanks for your dedication and commitment which I trust goes way beyond the call of duty. Thanks for investing your energy and gifts in the young people of Ireland.

The CEIST Charter roots your vision and your mission firmly in the Gospel of Jesus Christ who said: 'I came that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). Everything that we do, all that we stand for, comes back to that wonderful desire of Jesus - that we may have life and have it to the full! We all play our part in making that vision a reality for the young people in our care - we do our best, as your Charter puts it: to light the fire of faith, hope and love in their lives; to give them minds that are inquisitive for learning, to nourish in their hearts a hunger for wisdom and an instinct for compassion, to spark in them a spirit that is restless for justice (see CEIST Charter: Vision and Mission).

Let's face it, on the average school day, you don't get much of a chance to reflect on such lofty ideals! When there's an angry parent waiting outside the office, a troublesome transition year boy 'frying your head', and two teachers and a classroom assistant off with flu, you don't exactly reach for the CEIST charter! But I think we all recognise that without a charter, without a clear statement of our core values, and the ability to articulate what our ethos is about, then we end up simply 'fire-fighting' and 'chasing the wind' with nothing underneath to ground us.

The Conference organisers asked me to reflect with you on 'Living the message of Pope Francis in CEIST schools'. Let me begin by saying that there is very little, if anything, in the message of Pope Francis that is not already set out in your own Charter. But that should not surprise us, because your Charter is the distillation of reflection on decades of lived experience at the 'chalk face'. It is grounded in the ethos and tradition of five great religious congregations who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the education of young people in this country. In CEIST schools you stand on the shoulders of giants in Catholic education - Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, Anthony Receveur and Jules Chevalier. Your Charter represents a synthesis, a synergy of what is best in their thinking and vision for the Catholic school. Reading your Charter over these past weeks I'm convinced that there is little that I, or Pope Francis or anybody else for that matter, could add.

But still, there's something about Pope Francis, isn't there?!

What a surprise we got when this 76 year old Argentinian stood on the balcony of St Peter's a year and a half ago and asked for our prayers; the man who introduced himself to us, like St Patrick, saying 'I am Jorge Bergoglio, a sinner'. And then on his first Holy Thursday when he bent down to wash and kiss the feet of the young offenders at a juvenile detention centre, including those of a young Muslim woman, we knew there was something different about this Pope!

Like many others, I was caught up in the excitement surrounding our new Holy Father. I was preparing for my ordination as a bishop and trying to come up with a motto for my episcopal coat of arms. Inspired by the new Pope I chose those beautiful words from the psalms: 'Sing a new song to the Lord'.

I love the hope and optimism of those words. Pope Francis is determined to put the 'joy' back into the vocabulary of our faith. Almost a year ago he published what some people are calling his 'manifesto', *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Gospel of Joy). In it, he mocks our tendency towards 'joyless' Christianity. Christians, he said, you must not be like 'mummies in a museum'. An evangeliser must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! (10) Pope Francis has no time for the kind of 'defeatism' which turns us into 'disillusioned pessimists- or "sourpusses" as he calls them. He insists: 'Let us not allow ourselves to be 'robbed of hope' (83).

There is a definite temptation to rob the Church in Ireland of hope, to bemoan the decline in Church practice, the lack of vocations to the priesthood and religious life as signals that Ireland has 'lost the faith'. It is true that many people in Ireland have drifted away from regular Church practice; there's an increasing loss of the 'sense of the sacred' and more and more people seem to be growing used to living their lives with little or no reference to belief and trust in God. And there is no doubt that the dark cloud of abuse, with all its shame and scandal has not only brought tragic consequences for victims and their families, but also as Pope Benedict said, it has 'obscured the light of the gospel'.

In this context you might wonder: how can we dare to sing the Lord's song at all? But then along comes Pope Francis, suggesting that it is now, more than ever, that the world needs to hear the song of the Lord, 'the joy of the Gospel'. He challenges us to get out there and to bring faith to life. Apparently just before his election at the conclave in Rome he gave a short speech to his fellow cardinals. He used the popular image, from the Book of Revelation, of Jesus standing at the door and knocking. But in an inspired way, he turned the image around: "Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter, but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. The self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him out...." A Church which does not come out of herself to evangelise, he said, becomes self-referential and then gets sick.

Surely this is the greatest challenge and opportunity facing all the arms of our Church these days - our parishes, our homes and our Catholic schools, - how to we become 'missionary' and get out there, singing the new song of the Lord to the world?

Listen to this paragraph from *Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis says:

'I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.... If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life... my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security... while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37)'. It is clear to me that the heart of the message of Pope Francis for myself personally, for our communities and our schools, is the radical call of Jesus to mission and evangelisation - 'go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News'.

Since my ordination a lot of people have asked me what precisely do I understand 'Sing a new song' to mean. What is this new song? Does it mean changing the message or words? -Surely not, because we must always remain faithful to the Gospel message that has been handed down to us from generation to generation. Is it about changing the tune or the melody of the song - trying to make it more catchy, or easier to pick up? - Perhaps that is true in some ways, but then we must be careful that we are not simply trying to be popular and fashionable, picking and choosing only those bits of the Gospel message that appeal to us, those that are 'easy-listening'. We must not forget that the message of Jesus was often radical, 'counter-cultural', and disturbing and it often demands that we change the way we live our lives.

Pope Francis has an interesting perspective on the new evangelisation - what I call 'singing the new

song'. He says we must try to put everything we do into a new key - a 'missionary key'. Let me read from *Evangelium Gaudium*, and, as I do so, I want you to think what this means for you, working in a Catholic school in Ireland in 2014? I quote:

'I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation' (EG27) And again...

'Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way'. It invites everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities'. (EG33)

If you want to live the message of Pope Francis in CEIST schools today, then do not seek to rewrite the words of your Charter. Instead, consider putting everything in your Charter, and living your ethos in a missionary key!

What might that mean?

There are different ways of looking at 'mission'. There is mission 'ad intra', and mission 'ad extra'. Consider your mission 'ad intra' to be your internal or 'in-house' mission, the impact which your Charter and way of doing things is having on your own school community. Think of your mission 'ad extra' as referring to your mission outside, beyond the school gates - the impact you are having and the messages you are sending to the wider community. Of course these two aspects of mission are not entirely separate - the ethos of your school inside, your mission 'ad intra' how you are living and re-imagining the characteristic spirit of your school, itself sends a strong message 'ad extra' to the world outside.

By using the phrase mission 'ad intra' I am emphasising the reality that our school communities have themselves become mission territory! Just consider the faith context in which our schools are operating. Over the past twenty five years or so, like many other countries in Western Europe, there has been a steep decline in weekly practice and prayer amongst Catholics; our schools and their pupils are not immune from this. Teachers are finding themselves quite literally 'in loco parentis' as the first teachers of children in the ways of faith. Like parents, our teachers often struggle to compete with all the contradictory messages which contemporary culture hurls at our young people. In this context I believe that your schools have a vital part to play in the new evangelisation.

Look at the challenges which Pope Francis is presenting to our young people themselves. At World Youth Day in Rio last year, he told the young people present: 'The Lord needs you for His Church'. Unapologetically, he called them to be missionaries. 'Be active members of the Church', he said, 'go on the offensive... build a better world of justice, of love, of peace, of fraternity, of solidarity'. 'Don't leave it to others', he said. 'Don't be observers of life'. 'Get involved'. 'Be protagonists of change'.

A few days ago in Albania he said something similar. He invited young people to build their lives 'on the rock' that is Jesus Christ. Say "No" to the idolatry of money, he told them; Say "No" to the false freedom of individualism, "No" to addiction and to violence, Say "Yes" to a culture of encounter and of solidarity, "Yes" to the beauty that is inseparable from the good and the true; "Yes" to a life lived with great enthusiasm and at the same time faithful in little things.

If the Holy Father is calling like this on our young people to be agents of the new evangelisation, then it is important for us to ask ourselves: are we preparing them for mission? Are we facilitating them in grasping the truths of faith, growing in love of God and neighbour, and in becoming witnesses for Christ?

You will be well aware that because of so many influences on them, not least in the digital media, young people are often left without moral reference points and are easily swayed by ethical relativism, or by a comfortable 'spirituality without challenge'.

Sadly, as one young R.E. teacher told me recently: more young people are tempted towards a kind of 'nihilism', viewing life as basically meaningless. By far the most difficult and traumatic experience for me as a school principal was to get the news that some of my pupils and recent past pupils had taken their own lives and to witness the devastating impact it had on their families, close friends and my

school colleagues.

Our Catholic schools have a vital role to play in developing a 'creative apologetics' (EG 132) which will help our young people to present and explain to their world a 'consistent ethic of life', and, as the first letter of Peter puts it: "a reason for the hope that is within us" (1Pet 3:15). We must aim to send our pupils out 'in the service of love', emboldened with the Gospel of Joy, to change the world. We must help and encourage them to say a resounding 'Yes' to a culture of Life and 'No' to the creeping culture of death and destruction.

Pope Francis keeps emphasising that Christianity is not some kind of ethical choice or lofty idea, but about a personal friendship with Jesus which transforms our lives. It is worth asking ourselves the fundamental question: how many young people leave our Catholic schools after twelve or thirteen years with a sense of personal friendship with Jesus which gives their lives new meaning and a decisive direction?

I am aware, of course, that this is a sensitive topic for many principals and teachers. I know that your Charter places the spiritual development of pupils high up on the list of priorities for CEIST schools. But understandably you might ask: what precisely is the role of the school in helping a young person deepen her or his faith? Is that not primarily the responsibility of their parent or their parish? And if the Catholic school does have a part to play, then have we the necessary resources and formation in place to make that possible?

I am also well aware that our schools are becoming increasingly diverse with pupils and teachers from a wide variety of cultural, religious or non-religious backgrounds. Speaking earlier this year to the Plenary session of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Pope Francis pointed to the multicultural environment of Catholic schools and universities, where many students are not Christian or do not believe. He reminded us that Catholic education has, as its aim, not only the full development of every person, but also the desire 'to present Jesus Christ as the meaning of life, the cosmos and history'. Inside our Catholic schools we are increasingly finding ourselves in a space of dialogue and encounter, not unlike that in which Jesus began to proclaim the Good News - a 'Galilee of the nations', a crossroads' of people, diverse in terms of race, culture and religion'. In this context we exercise our mission 'ad intra', attempting to maintain what Pope Francis calls 'a courageous and innovative fidelity that enables Catholic identity to encounter the various 'souls' of multicultural society'.

I recommend that we continually ask ourselves a number of key questions regarding our mission 'ad intra':

- * What opportunities are we providing for pupils and our teachers to grow in the love of God?
- * To what extent is the spirit-filled praise and worship of God a central feature of the life of our school?
- * Do our pupils, through their religious education and other curriculum opportunities have the chance to gain a mature understanding of their faith which will equip them to dialogue in an adult manner about what it is they believe?

I know that many teachers express their personal lack of confidence when it comes to witnessing to their faith in any kind of public manner, either inside or outside school. In some cases they too may have fallen away from regular practice of their faith, or perhaps they have had insufficient support or mature formation in knowing and understanding the truths of the Catholic faith. For whatever reason, they may feel uncomfortable in leading prayer at assembly or form class, or talking to their pupils about faith matters - especially in an age when young people are well able to put you 'on the spot' over a tricky moral dilemma or about some aspect of the Church's teaching.

I therefore commend the CEIST initiative Joining the Dots, which invites teachers to explore and grow in their own faith and spirituality and try to connect it with their lives, especially their lives as teachers. It is a clear example of CEIST exercising its role in canon law as a 'public juridic person'. This status, granted to CEIST by the Irish Bishops' Conference, gives your Trust a notable ecclesial role akin to that of a religious congregation or a parish in providing Catholic education for this and future generations. It is a responsibility shared with the parishes and the dioceses in which you work.

The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Share the Good News, clearly situates 'catechesis

within the call to evangelise... and provides principles and guidelines for evangelisation, catechesis and religious education today motivating us to study and research all the means available to bring the Gospel to life anew every day' (preface, SGN)

If we are to become schools which live life 'in a missionary key' both 'ad intra' and 'ad extra' then our challenge is to find ways of contributing to the many new faith development opportunities that are happening at parish, diocesan and national level. These initiatives are helping many Irish Catholics, young and older to develop their 'Catholic voice', to find a maturity of language and vocabulary that will allow them to communicate the truth of the Gospel message in a sometimes aggressively secular world.

The vision of Share the Good News, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland is one of homes, schools and parishes linking up in new ways to hand on the faith in the 21st century. I encourage you to evaluate, in cooperation with your Diocesan advisors and the CEIST faith development coordinators, your current catechetical and religious education programmes and to grasp every opportunity to revitalise the links you have with the homes and parishes of your pupils so that you too can become part of the new evangelisation in Ireland.

Next week thousands of transition year students are gathering at Knock for the Youth Catechism Conference. Your school might become the catalyst for the introduction of a catechetical programme for teachers and parents, perhaps one based upon the new Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults or the Robert Barron Catholicism Series, or the Maryvale Adult Faith Programmes. Might we encourage our teachers to avail of these programmes and, indeed, to be trained as facilitators of these programmes for other adults or senior cycle students in a parish setting?

There is a particular way in which CEIST schools can continue to give voice 'ad extra' to the new song of the Lord. CEIST schools are notably inclusive. You can be proud of your efforts to serve the most disadvantaged students in our society. When commentators speak about 'inclusion' in Irish schools they are almost always referring to religious inclusion. Yet the greatest challenge all schools face is that of social inclusion. Your schools have an excellent record when it comes to the integration of migrants, traveller education and support for students with special needs. I encourage you to continue and develop this rich tradition which is so much in keeping with the intention of your founders and with the gospel vision that Pope Francis is presenting. Almost every day our Holy Father challenges us to reach out to the poor and tackle inequality. He refers regularly to the 'scandal of global hunger' and says 'we cannot look the other way and pretend that global hunger does not exist'.

It is true that Ireland remains one of the most generous countries in the world when it comes to supporting development aid and our schools raise large amounts for charity. But I think that Pope Francis is reminding us that solidarity with the poor is about more than giving from what we have left over. He is calling us to examine our whole lives, our mindset, our personal attitudes to money and possessions. And these are issues which our Catholic schools must present to our young people who are so easily caught up in the materialism that surrounds them. Where do we find fulfilment in our lives? Is it in the material things that we own, or is it in becoming a more rounded and generous person who is deeply conscious of the impact of our lifestyle on the earth and on the poorest peoples who share this planet with us? Pope Francis is asking us to confront our worldliness, that 'throwaway culture' which reduces everyone and everything to consumers or units of consumption; he invites us to be permanently 'tuned in' to hearing the cry of the poor, the excluded, the marginalised and the forgotten. Indeed he goes further, he asks us to go out to the peripheries, to meet the poor and excluded where they are at.

Let me quote *Evangelii Gaudium* again: 'None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice (201)'; (Christians) 'are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current (economic) model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life (EG209).

I applaud those Catholic schools that organise outreach programmes for their pupils, who have established youth branches of St Vincent de Paul Society, who organise trips to Lourdes as helpers of the sick, educational visits to orphanages in Romania, or to mission countries like Kenya or Uganda. These experiences can have a profound, lifelong impact on our young people and on the teachers

who accompany them. Development education and Catholic social teaching ought to be a compulsory part of the curriculum in all Catholic schools so that teachers and young people can be aware of issues such as solidarity, fair distribution of the world's goods, and about the impact of poverty on the dignity of the human person.

In this regard, within our Catholic education system as a whole, we must continue to look out for those who are left behind or neglected in any way. The holy founders of your schools were clearly inspired by a preferential option for the poor. I would encourage CEIST to lead the way in researching and confronting any inequalities which might continue to exist in our educational system. Look at admissions policies, exclusion policies, special needs and bullying policies to see what messages your school is sending 'ad extra' about what you stand for.

I would like to conclude by affirming you once more in your roles as school leaders - principals, deputies, Chairs and other members of Boards of Management. Never underestimate the calling that you have received. School effectiveness research continually points to the role of the school leader in the successful school - parents know the importance of school leaders in the lives of their children, teachers and other staff respond to good leadership and pupils themselves sense it. You play a vital role in upholding the characteristic spirit of your CEIST school, and that means being prepared to continually reimagine what it means to be a CEIST school in today's Ireland.

Can I signal for you an important document which is soon to be issued by the Catholic Schools Partnership entitled 'Catholic Second Level Schools in Ireland - Looking to the Future'. The document explores how our current second-level education system has evolved but more importantly, it sets out a number of challenges which face us if we hope to present a united voice for Catholic education in this country into the future. I encourage you to read the document when it is published and participate in the ongoing conversation about how we might all work better together in partnership and leadership for the benefit of all our young people.

To conclude I would like to share with you my experience of meeting Pope Francis this time last year. I was in Rome with a group of newly ordained bishops and Pope Francis spoke to us about the role of the Bishop as shepherd of his diocese. Much of what he said might also be true of school leaders who in many ways are the shepherds of their schools. He said often a shepherd has to be ahead of his flock, bringing them on and identifying the way forward. At other times a shepherd has to be behind the flock, driving them on, looking out for the strays who are being left behind. And then Pope Francis brought a smile to our faces when he added that most of the time, a shepherd has to be in the middle of his sheep, 'getting to know the smell of his sheep'!

My friends I'm not sure that you would want to get to know the smell of your sheep much more than you already do, but I wish you every blessing as you 'lead' and 'drive forward' the school communities that have been entrusted to your care. In offering you the challenge of putting your CEIST charter firmly into a missionary key, at the same time I am deeply grateful for all you are already doing to look after your flocks.

I leave you with a final quote from Pope Francis who said: 'Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture' (EG 134).

May God bless you, your staff, pupils and all the members of your school communities.