



Reader 1: We begin our Prayer, together, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.” And we light this candle as a sign and symbol of God’s loving presence with us as we begin our first meeting of this academic year.



Reader 2: Much has been made over the last number of months of the importance of ‘social cohesion’. In challenging and difficult times, being together as a society can make all the difference; in fact, it has made all the difference. We might have a sense at the moment, of this fraying at the edges but the importance of it still stands.

Social cohesion refers to the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. It identifies two main dimensions: the sense of belonging of a community and the relationships among members within the community itself. Without social cohesion, societies fail, they break down. This is particularly true for societies facing challenging times. In these scenarios, it is invariably the weakest who suffer. For this evening’s prayer let’s take some time together to reflect on social cohesion as it relates to our school community. For us as a school community, social cohesion is the life blood of all that we do.

Reader 3: We listen now to the Word of God.

A reading from the First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

¹²There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. ¹³We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. ¹⁴So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts.

¹⁵Suppose the foot says, "I am not a hand. So I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And suppose the ear says, "I am not an eye. So I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? ¹⁸God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be. ¹⁹If all the parts were the same, how could there be a body? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body.

²¹The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without. ²³The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honour. The private parts aren't shown. But they are treated with special care. ²⁴The parts that can be shown don't need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honour to the parts that didn't have any. ²⁵In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part shares in its joy.

²⁷You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

The Word of the Lord (Thanks be to God).

Reader 4: Some scripture scholars argue that there are four fairly simple lessons to be learned from this passage about being community together. And their relevance to our Catholic school is pretty clear as well. They are:

1. Firstly, St Paul is clearly telling us in this passage that Jesus is the head of the Church. Everything a Christian community does references back to Christ. What does this mean for our school community? It means that we always ask ourselves, what Christ would want of us as a community? Who would it be that Christ would be pointing to in terms of needing particular support and help? What would Jesus do, sounds like a cliché for Catholic schools, but it really is this question that is at the heart of our decision making.
2. The second lesson we learn here is around unity and diversity; many parts working together and recognising their part in one body. This gives room for individual expression and gifts – in fact both are essential for the life blood of the community. What does this mean for our school? Catholic schools are incredibly diverse and interesting places, this diversity can be celebrated as an expression of what it means to be Church. Our gifts and talents, in

particular, are celebrated and used for the good of the community. For a Catholic school, we celebrate this diversity through our school's liturgical and sacramental life. We also celebrate it through our policies and how we interact with one another. We celebrate one another and we enjoy one another's gifts and talents.

3. The third lesson is around equality. By virtue of our baptism as well as our humanity, we are equal. No one is more valuable and more important than the other person. Equality of treatment is therefore very important in Christian community, as are equality of opportunity and equality of experience. This doesn't mean we're all the same, of course, but it does mean, in God's eyes everyone is equal. For our school, what does this mean in terms of a culture of expectation, for example, for all students? What does it mean for the student who is struggling or feeling isolated? These are the kinds of questions this passage throws up for us.
4. Our fourth lesson here is around interdependence. Because God is Trinity, we who are made in God's image, are also made for community. We can't do it by ourselves. We need our brothers and sisters. Gone is any kind of individualism and in its place is a kind of community that includes, embraces diversity and respects the gifts and talents we all bring. And there's something very inspiring about that for our school. In it we realise we are really not alone. We are together because we are made to be together.

Reader 5: We pray together,

For our students. Lord, guide them and keep them. Help them always to know your great love for them, particularly through our care for them. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us)

For our teachers. Lord, guide them and keep them. Help them to serve you through their service of our students; particularly those students who are most in need of their care. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

For the families within our community. Lord guide them and keep them. Help them to support the young people in their care. Help them to teach them of your great love for them. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

For our principal, deputy principal(s) and school management team. Lord guide them and keep them. In these challenging times, help them to realise the value of their work. Keep them safe, bring them peace and help them come to an ever-deeper awareness of your love for them. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

For one another as members of the BOM. Lord guide us and keep us. Help us to work always for the good of our school. Help us to build unity, to celebrate diversity and equality, to understand interdependence in our own work together. Above all, help us to realise it is you that are in charge of all that is done in our school. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

Reader 6: We conclude our prayer by saying together, "Our Father....."

Our schools are faith communities of welcome and hospitality where gospel values are lived and where there is a special care for those most in need. CEIST Charter