

PIWG News

Advent 2017

The Parent Involvement Working Group promote the active involvement of parents in their children's education in Catholic schools. They meet 4 times per school year and focus on developing support for parents, engaging with their views on important issues and encouraging them to support the work of Catholic schools and parishes.



Welcome from the Chair 2

Advent in the home 3-5

Hosting a Cluster Meeting 6

Developing In Faith 7

Scottish Government consult parents 8

We're on the Web!
www.sces.org.uk



Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its own specific and unique educational mission. The educational task of the family and that of the school complement one another in many concrete areas.

(Congregation for Catholic Education)



Phone: 0141 556 4727
Fax: 0141 551 8467
E-mail:
parents@sces.uk.com

Welcome

November 30th 2017
Feast of St. Andrew

Welcome to the very first bulletin from the Parent Involvement Working Group! This initiative is in response to your feedback given at the National Parent Gathering in Carfin in January when many parents told us they would like to know more about our work and how they could be more involved in promoting all that is great about Catholic Education in Scotland.

In this issue you can read about the cluster parent council meetings which took place in Fife in May, how you can be involved in improving Catholic schools and the Scottish government's planned changes to school governance. We will also help you create an oasis of calm for your family this Advent.

We would love to hear what you think of our new e-bulletin.

Get in touch by emailing parents@sces.uk.com

So as we prepare to welcome Jesus into our hearts and homes let us Keep Calm! and spread a message of hope and joy through our schools and communities.

God bless,

Jo Soares



WELCOME PARENTS!

CALLING ALL PARENTS: The PIWG are from across the country and are passionate about ensuring that the voice of Catholic parents is heard. If your school, parish or cluster would like support in involving parents then please get in touch. And we will do what we can to help.

Keep Calm it's Advent!

All of us at the parental working group find that as Christmas rushes towards us that we are all full of **good intentions** to '**Keep Christ in Christmas**' and every year we find ourselves happily looking at our families and homes filled with Christmas but with the nagging question 'are we filled with **'Christ'**'?

If we are not cleaning, shopping, going to or even organising Christmas Shows or Fetes then we're cooking, decorating, writing cards with the notion that it will be very different next year! And for some of us Christmas is also the busiest time within our workplace. This puts extra pressure on us and although it may make us extremely organised with our commercial Christmas it can heavily impact on our Spiritual Christmas.

But never fear **Advent here!** I know it's hard to believe but come the 1st December you're going say '**Keep Calm it's Advent.**

Advent

Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming'. So let us prepare our hearts and homes as if Jesus himself was coming to Christmas dinner and let's get everyone in the family involved.

So here are some ideas to allow us to prepare for a most wonderful Holy Christmas full of joy, love and peace, without doing anything different just changing the focus!

The traditions of the Church are a great way to guide and allow us to focus our daily tasks in serving Christ.

We can use the Advent Wreath as our guide to our preparations. We can either make or buy a wreath or even just some simple tea lights. Another simple idea is to use a drawing or print off of a Christmas Wreath and let the wee ones colour it in as the weeks go by. Remember you can use the ideas as you wish. You may want to change the activities to suit your family's routine.

Each week will have two elements. One thread will be spiritual and the second thread is practical with both threads intertwining.



1st Candle (Purple).

The Prophecy Candle or Candle of Hope
 'And again, Isaiah says, 'the Roots of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.'

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' - Roman 15: 12-13

Hope – pray with the family at dinner time or night time. But don't worry if it's not a scene from the Walton's: believe us it never is! The first three Joyful mysteries are great night time stories for young ones or mediation for teens and parents alike. You don't need to do a full rosary you can concentrate on one mystery at a time.

Get the family involved – Why not get Holy Christmas Cards and get the children involved with helping writing or sticking on the stamps. See writing your cards as sending the peace of Christ to others. Whilst an elderly neighbour would love a hand delivered cards and a 5 minute chat. And don't be afraid to evangelise to your children with the gift of hope and don't be afraid to write

God Bless

**2nd Candle (Purple)**

The Bethlehem Candle or the Candle of Preparation

When we are running about shopping and cleaning and really it would be easier without the young ones let's try and stop. Stop and get the young ones involved. When you are food shopping get the children to put some additional items into the trolley for the local foodbank. Alternatively you could create a reverse advent calendar by putting an item a day into a basket and then donating to those in need. Or get the kids to buy a toy for a children's charity – Discuss the story of St Nicholas.

The Advent candle readily demonstrates the strong contrast between darkness and light. In the Bible, Christ is referred to as 'the Light of the World' contrasted by the darkness of sin.

Why not go to confession as a family even if your kids are too young let them see you going to confession – the importance of saying sorry and having a happy heart. Make a celebration of it with maybe a cake after dinner - show the joy of forgiveness.

3rd Candle (Pink)

The Shepherd's Candle or The Candle of Joy

Get decorating! When cleaning and preparing the house 'offer it up', think of it as preparing for Christ coming. Talk as a family about Jesus's birthday and for older children about preparing both domestically and spiritually for Christ coming. Focus on how blest we are to have what we have – put on Christmas tunes on and enjoy the preparation.

While putting up the Christmas tree discuss St Boniface (eighth century Bishop). You can leave off the tree topper until week four so you can thread the theme of Peace, light and joy and reaffirming the Christmas tree as a Christian Symbol.

End the decorations by setting out the Crib discuss the figures as you place them in the stable. Why not think about leaving the baby Jesus until Christmas day? Instead use cards with words such as 'joy' 'peace' 'love' where the manger will be.

4th Candle (Purple)

The Angel's Candle reminding us of the angel's message of 'Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men'

Enjoy all the festivities of Christmas Parties and Nativity Plays. Talk in your family about the celebration of the 'coming' and why we are dressing up and celebrating. If you have time draw a banner with 'Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men'. Use this as a focus for your prayers this week both in your family and your personal reflections. Get the tree topper out whether it's an angel or a star. Pray about the Angel's message of Peace or the Star guiding us to Christ and what Christ will gift to us. It can't be bought or wrapped, it can only be received.

Be open with your family about why Jesus is coming and that coming is for All People regardless of race, colour or creed. Pray for peace in our families and in the world. Peace in the world starts with each one of us especially within our family and believe me all of us at the parental working group know how difficult peace within the family can be especially at this time. So relax do what you need to do but do it for Christ!



Cluster Meetings for Parents

Jo Soares, the chair of the PIWVG shares some information about an initiative to gather parents from the local cluster together

“As you may be aware, we have recently written out to all parent councils to suggest organising 'cluster parent council meetings' including representatives from a high school parent council and all their associated primaries. Two 'cluster' parent councils meetings took place in Fife during the summer term of last session and we would like to share a little of the experiences of those who attended.

The first meeting was at St Andrew's RC High School in Kirkcaldy to which all of its associated primary school parent councils were invited and the second at St Columba's RC High School in Dunfermline, again with representation from its associated primaries. Thus all Catholic schools in Fife were invited to one of the two events. These meetings were convened by the Church's representative on Fife Council with the objective of promoting parental involvement in local Catholic schools but the model lends itself to organisation by the parent council of one particular school who could then invite members of their cluster. Discussions could be fairly general or focused on a particular theme with local relevance.

To initiate discussion at the Fife meetings, speakers were invited including Barbara Coupar (Director, Scottish Catholic Education Service), Julie Makein and Jo Soares (Parent Involvement Working Group), Patrick Callaghan (Headteacher, St Andrew's RC High School), Patricia Carroll and Margaret Murray (RE advisors, Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh). Informative presentations led attendees through the support networks which are available to parent councils to enable them to contribute to the Catholic mission of their schools.

Following the presentations there was opportunity for wide-ranging discussion. Particularly those attending shared how their parent councils were already contributing to the promotion of the Catholic ethos of their schools and the challenges they faced; especially in trying to encourage greater involvement from families.

All those who attended agreed that the evening was worthwhile and informative. Further cluster parent council meetings are planned in Fife, ideally at least one in each academic session, and these will focus in on particular issues most commonly felt in the local area. We found that the model is effective in reaching out to families with children attending Catholic schools and has potential to reach all families if those attending cascade information within their school and community.”

For further information or help with organising a parent council cluster meeting in your area contact parents@sces.uk.com



Developing in Faith

Members of the PIWG have been looking at the resource 'Developing In Faith' which helps schools with their self evaluation process. Parents are key to the use of this within schools, and here the PIWG share what you can do to help:



"Developing in Faith is a document which is in all Catholic schools and is designed to help schools in their on going self-evaluation process. The document has deliberately been written with the same structure as Education Scotland materials so that teachers find it easy to use and integral to work which is already on going.

Developing in Faith starts with the vision of a Catholic school, which is articulated in the [Charter for Catholic Schools](#) in Scotland, which all of our schools use as key points of reference. Developing in Faith then goes on to identify five themes under which there are points for reflection and dialogue. These points can be used by school staff, pupils and parents to identify their school's strengths and areas for development.

Last year, the PIWG looked at questions specifically for parents to reflect on their own contribution to their school communities under the themes from Developing in Faith and these were trialled at the Parent Gathering which took place in January 2017. In this bulletin we look at the characteristics of a Catholic school under the theme: **Developing as a Community of Faith and Learning.**

Our school shows a commitment to the integrated education and formation of the whole person, in close partnership with parents, as the first educators of their children.

Our schools said:-

"we are well supported by our parents who regularly attend services and assemblies in school as well as Sacramental Retreat evenings"

"this year we have further developed the work of the Pope Francis Faith Award and we have made more positive links with charities to allow children to perform their faith actions"

"Family Learning Committee established to take forward aspects of parental partnership"

Reflect as an individual and as the parent council for your school :-

Do I/ we accept the responsibility as the first educator(s) of our children and do I/ we feel this responsibility is accepted and prioritised by the school?

Our school shows an inclusive ethos which aims to honour the life, dignity and voice of each person, made in the image of God.

Our schools said:-

"robust policies on inclusion which report, act on and restore any issues regarding bullying, racism, sectarianism and equal opportunities which have restorative practice at their roots"

"every child is valued and Christian values are promoted through the schools vision, values and aims, school rationale and positive behaviour policy"



"we have successfully embedded our school values of respect, holiness, honesty, forgiveness, and fairness in the daily life of the school"

Reflect as an individual and as the parent council for your school :-

Can I/ we identify inclusive Christian values through school policies and procedures e.g. anti-bullying, equal opportunities and how do I/ we promote these values within the wider school and parish community?

Governance of Schools

Scottish Government have been talking about how we get Scotland to the point where our schools are helping children to reach their full potential.

You may have heard them speaking about “delivering excellence and equity for our children”, “improvement in attainment (literacy & numeracy)”, “closing the attainment gap between the most and least off”, “improving children and young people’s health and wellbeing” and “improving employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people”.



The Scottish Government have now launched a consultation on proposed changes to the way schools are governed and we want to make sure that parents of children in Catholic schools have their say on the questions being asked.

Your involvement in our Catholic schools is ever important if they are to not only retain their character but also to grow as communities of Faith and learning.

Some of the issues within the consultation include how to:

1. Headteachers’ Charter
2. Parental and Community Engagement
3. Pupil Participation
4. Regional Improvement Collaboratives
5. Education Workforce Council for Scotland



With your help we can make sure that the messages delivered to Scottish Government reflect how Catholic schools are working to support families and local communities.

We want to share the benefits of the role of the parent and the family in the education of children, the positive outcomes of being part of an extended faith community and help parents become more confident in sharing their views and opinions on what is best for their own children.

To see the full consultation and to have your say visit:
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00527167.pdf>

