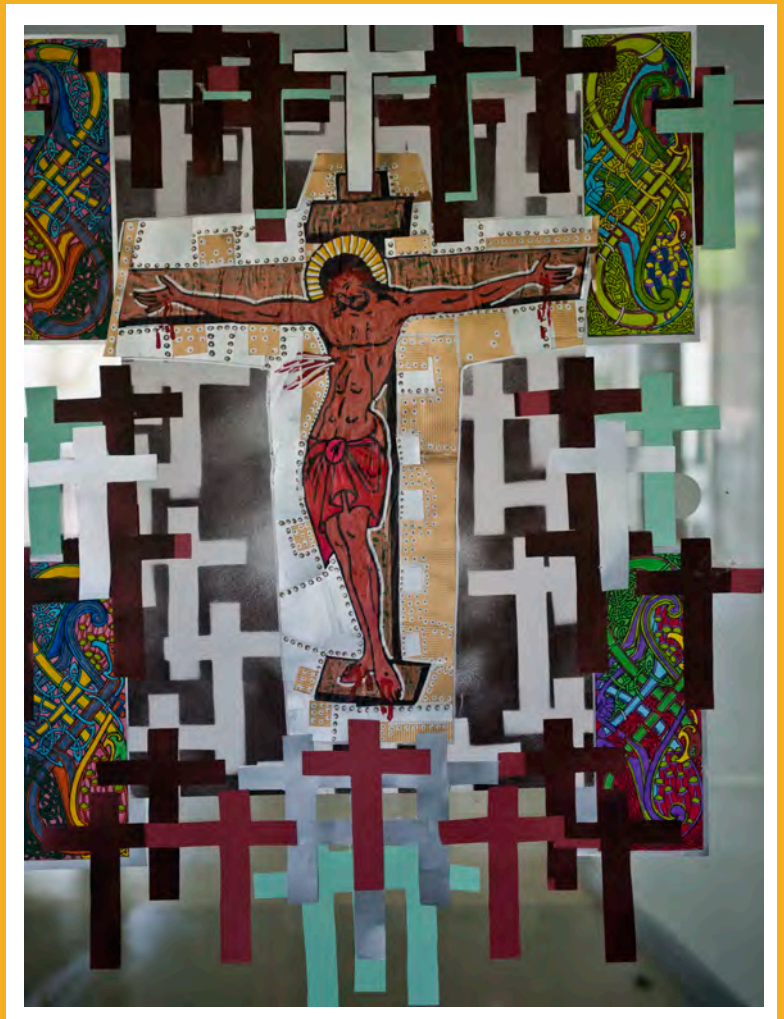


*called to
flourish
in faith
and hope*



Catholic Education Service

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*'The glory of God,' St Iraneus wrote in the second century,
'is a human being fully alive.'
This is the goal of Catholic education,
to draw out the potential in each person to the full,
in a community which recognises the centrality of Christ
as our guide and inspiration.¹*

introduction

In *Flourishing Together*, the CST, the Church of England and the CES came together 'to set out a collective and hope-filled vision - that the best unifying concept around which to build the education system for the coming decades is that of *flourishing* – flourishing children and flourishing adults in flourishing schools'². *Called to Flourish in Faith and Hope*, explores this understanding more fully from a Catholic educational perspective.

What does it mean 'to flourish' in a school inspired by the Catholic tradition? It is an understanding that we are all made in the image and likeness of God, gifted with an inherent dignity and graced with a transcendent purpose to realise God's love on earth. In the daily life of a school, this dignity and purpose is manifest in a pedagogical approach which seeks to engender a holistic formation of the person so we may realise life in all its fullness in mind, body and spirit³.

'An all-round education seeks to develop every aspect of the individual: social, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual. For there is ecology of human growth which means that if any one of these elements is overlooked all others suffer'⁴.

Therefore a Catholic education offers a 'sound academic education, within a caring community, underpinned with a coherent ideology'⁵ and it is this ideology that defines, directs and informs every aspect of the educational experience. In so doing, it constructs and shapes an ethos which identifies and makes tangible the way in which this ideology can be inhabited and shared.

This is realised through behaviours, what we do, and operations, how we do it, both being explicitly informed by why we do it. Drawing upon *Gaudium et Spes*, this 'why' can be identified as 'the archetypal search for what is "true and good"' and one that 'should 'encompass all aspects of human endeavour in our schools, conducted within every classroom and school department, within the whole school curriculum and in all extra-curricular activities'⁶.

Therefore a flourishing school is one in which both 'behaviours' and 'operations', the personal and the commercial 'are unified and exemplified in 'a moral enterprise'. Bowen identifies this in exercising the virtues, providing 'opportunities not only to 'do the good', but educating in virtues so that' a disposition towards the good is both 'firm' and 'habitual'. Habits make us who we are. The educational challenge is to find ways that this enterprise can be imaginatively and engagingly undertaken in our schools'⁷.

In our collaborative paper, *Flourishing Together*, this challenge was explored through the five realms of flourishing identified by Swaner and Wolfe⁸: Purpose; Relationships; Learning; Resources and Wellbeing. Mindful of the call for Catholic education 'to witness to alternative values and demonstrate the possibility of a different lifestyle'⁹, we will seek to understand what it is to flourish within five comparable but distinct realms: Mission; Communion; Formation; Gifts and Fruitfulness, offering 'a genuine integration of both human learning and religious faith, around the person of Christ'¹⁰.

mission

The mission of the Church and by virtue of that, the mission of Catholic education is to form individuals so that they may best respond to the call to human fulfilment through relationship with God¹¹. Canon Law acknowledges this, asking that Catholic schools 'pay regard to the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young people are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom and be formed to take an active part in social life'¹². This is an empowering educational narrative, an unequivocal call to our schools to be places of human flourishing in which we will realise the fullness of our potential in all its dimensions: physical, mental, spiritual and relational.

St John Henry Newman recognises this in the prayer, *The Mission of My Life*, in which he explores how each one of us is called to fulfil a unique vocation in our own time and place.

*'God has created me to do Him some definite service.
He has committed some work to me
which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission. I may never know it in this life,
but I shall be told it in the next.
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for naught.
I shall do good; I shall do His work.'*¹³

Fulfilling this vocation, in all its uncertainty and challenge, requires trust: trust in each other in discerning what our purpose is and trust in a God 'who does nothing in vain...[and who] knows what He is about'¹⁴. Our schools, are therefore, called to be places in which this unique vocation can be discerned and realised and by truly committing to this relationship of trust, we are brought to an understanding of our giftedness and our call to flourishing. Newman's prayer acknowledges that we may not see or understand the full fruit of this flourishing in the here and now, but we will do in eternity.

This realises the transcendent nature of Catholic education whose mission is not simply to prepare us for a flourishing life in this world but also in the next: 'only in time and beyond our own death will we see the way God is using us for his plans and providence. The totality of our lives is greater than the sum of its parts'¹⁵.

Therefore our 'flourishing' is intimately tied to both faith and hope: faith in God, from whom all life, all good things come and a hope in our courage and abilities to realise the promise of this call to fullness of life both now and in the future.

This mission extends to all who participate in the life of our schools. 'The history of Catholic schools is characterised by welcoming pupils from different cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations', therefore within this tradition, we are called to be 'courageous' and show 'innovative fidelity' to our distinct pedagogical vision, through *knowing* it, *bearing witness* to and *dialoguing* with diversity¹⁶. This dialogue is an essential component of our contemporary mission in education. In a broader sense, it contributes to and 'fosters a peaceful society', but in a personal sense, it creates 'the conditions for a person to develop a gift for searching and to be guided in discovering the mystery of his being and of the reality that surrounds him'.

This may bring some to the 'threshold of faith' and others to an 'experience of faith'¹⁷ but it invites all to a deepening experience, a flourishing which synthesises faith and life, promoting the dignity of the individual, positively encouraging and forming all to a growing awareness of our world and an understanding of our place in it.

formation

The imperative of Catholic education for all who participate in it is to develop 'the language of the mind, the language of the heart, and the language of the hands...the three languages, in harmony and together'¹⁸. This is, perhaps, more readily described, within a Catholic context, as 'Formation': "a continuous process of personal maturation and conformity to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit"¹⁹. In the context of the school, formation, therefore, is an educational intent that asks us to accompany and nurture human growth in consciousness, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs so that all may live a flourishing life according to their vocation.

The Catholic school is an ideal locus for such formation, as 'the development of the inner character rather than mere academic achievement, is the leitmotif of its educational vision'²⁰. Schools form minds, 'bringing people into contact with a rich cultural and scientific heritage, preparing them for professional life and fostering mutual understanding' but this learning must be characterised and 'supported by means of a solid permanent formation'²¹ which is not merely academic but fosters both human and Christian perfection. And this imperative to formation 'is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all'²². Not only are teachers called to create learning environments that provide 'plentiful opportunities...[for] profound learning'²³ but they are also invited to be formed by this life-enriching pedagogy. Indeed, *Christifideles Laici* calls this one of the 'convictions' of formation: '...one cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation: this, in fact, is essentially a "formation of self". The other 'conviction of formation' is the cyclical and progressive nature of this process, in that 'the more we are formed and the more we feel the need to pursue and deepen our formation, still more will we be formed and be rendered capable of forming others'²⁴.

An awareness and openness to this pedagogy and culture is required if one is going to commit to being sufficiently personally, intellectually and spiritually stimulated to allow oneself to be formed by it.

For it is 'the 'being' of this educational philosophy as well as the 'doing' of it that is its signifier, creating a context within which human flourishing and formation can authentically occur. In this way, Catholic education is a comprehensive formation process that develops the whole person, integrating faith with cultural and moral education, and fostering a community of learning that reflects the teachings of Christ.

communion

‘It is in relationships, in our communion with each other, rather than in isolation from others that we will find fulfilment’²⁵. These words from *The Sign We Give*, lay emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships within the school community and its significance in creating a flourishing school. All schools seek to achieve this flourishing in community, ‘characterised by a sense of belonging...within a creative and innovative pedagogical vision’²⁶, but in addition, for Catholic schools, this ‘communion’ is also realised within a sacramental reality. Therefore, ‘communion’ epitomises the very nature of a Catholic school, secularly and spiritually, as an environment where pupils are nurtured in faith and moral understanding as relational beings.

This formational culture is created not simply through didactic education but through inference, implication, atmosphere and ethos, in the day-to-day actions and life of the school community. And it may be argued that it is most fully realised when the community celebrates together sacramentally: ‘The Eucharist both perfectly signifies and wonderfully effects that sharing in God’s life and unity of God’s people by which the Church exists’²⁷. Given the rich diversity of our schools, this may seem contrary, but the presence and active participation of the whole school community in such celebrations draws it into communion, reinforcing its spiritual unity through its very expression.

In this way, the sacramental communion becomes a lived communion, incarnated in the all areas of school life - social, educational, cultural, relational. ‘We cannot share the eucharistic bread without sharing our daily bread as well.’²⁸

The Religious Education Directory reminds us that '[c]onsonant with the ecclesiology outlined in *Lumen Gentium*, the school is not simply an institution, a place where the mind is developed and formed, but a community, suffused with 'a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.'²⁹

This freedom is understood through the acquisition of knowledge, knowledge of self, knowledge of the world, knowledge of life and knowledge of faith. This charity is realised in communion with the world, in the way pupils and staff learn to exercise their freedom responsibly and for the common good.

By giving witness in this way, the Catholic school educates for communion with society, the Church and the wider world because it is not simply an institution but a community, a flourishing community living out its sacramental communion in the ordinary lives of its members.

gifts

A flourishing school is one that recognises the gifts of its members and provides opportunities to allow them to flourish for the common good of all. Just as we are assured that ‘there is a variety of gifts’, a school community relies on individual personal and professional gifts and therefore the gifts of its community to realise its vision. These gifts take many forms, echoing the ‘varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts’ bestowed by the Holy Spirit³⁰ and whether ‘extraordinary or simple and humble...[they] are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church’³¹ and in our context, the school community.

St Paul elucidates a range of gifts which are present in us all, to varying degrees: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, leading, showing mercy³². These are motivational gifts, ministries of action which form our character, our personalities and often our vocations. And they are gifts that we are called to use for the benefit of our communities in how we are, our disposition, and in what we do, our occupation. The school makes manifest all the motivational gifts across a range of disciplines and roles: architects and builders who design and construct life enhancing learning spaces; facilities staff, who maintain an environment that is fit for learning; administrators who ensure the business life of the school is run with care and due diligence, and so on. In this way, each school community ‘discern[s] the gifts of its members in relation to its vision of the kingdom of God’, forming staff and pupils ‘from below, through little Church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity’³³.

It is this sharing of ‘gifts that differ’ which contributes to a stewardship of the whole educational endeavour, with each individual gift, enhanced and reliant on the gift of the other. The prophet creating the vision; the server building the vision; the teacher communicating the vision; the exhorter, encouraging all to participate in the vision; the contributor, giving time, talent, finance to resource the vision; the leader, organising, directing, administering the vision; the one who shows mercy, ensuring the vision is realised with compassion and care.

Of course, there are challenges and difficulties in this, but these will be navigated using the gifts of the community to inform decision-making that supports and safeguards a culture of flourishing, in which we engage responsibly with the world and with one another.

fruitfulness

Fruitfulness is a call to cultivate life to its fullest, an invitation to an inner and outward flourishing for the development of society, spiritually, morally and culturally. The fruits of the Holy Spirit, as enumerated in Galatians 5:22-23, include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Such virtues are manifestations of our gifts and are seen as the hallmarks of a life well-lived, embodying the love of Christ in action. Pope Francis suggests that it is a good spiritual exercise to read this list 'and take a look at our own behaviour to see if it corresponds, if our life is truly in accordance with the Holy Spirit, if it bears these fruits'. For if our schools are to be places of flourishing, then we are called to be the bearer of such fruits and must, therefore, nurture them within ourselves: 'A person who is at peace, who is joyful and who loves. With these three traits, the action of the Spirit can be seen'³⁴.

Exercising such a positive approach to life can only serve to make us mindful of our own wellbeing and the need for time and space in our lives, in our schools to reflect, pray, recharge and refresh. Our schools can never simply be bureaucratic places of learning, academic businesses 'dealing with a dense mass of rules and regulations'. This can be any association: 'but no, this is not the Church!'³⁵ Pope Francis reminds us that we cannot 'forget the original fruitfulness of love nourished by prayer which brings peace and joyful witness'.

We are, therefore, asked to nurture fruitfulness in ourselves so that we can extend it in loving service to our schools. 'This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable' but 'we may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost...no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity.

It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper...'³⁶ Therefore, and with conviction, we have the responsibility to be contributors to this educational endeavour, in the hope it will bear fruit for us all.

conclusion

Participation in the mission of the Church in education is a call to flourishing. It is a call to a fullness of life, a nurturing into being fully alive in mind, body and spirit through a 'process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony. Such a school is truly an educational community, a place of differences living together in harmony'³⁷. Such a school is a flourishing school.

notes

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- ⁶ *Formation in Virtues: Educating the Whole Person*, Department of Catholic Education and Formation, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, London, April 2020, p.3.
- ⁷ Ibid. p3.
- ⁸ See *Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System*, National Society for Education 2023, and Swaner, L. & Wolfe, A. *Flourishing Together – A Christian Vision for Flourishing Children, Flourishing Educators and Flourishing Schools*, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan 2021.
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- ¹⁵ Swann, November 15th 2019, <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/unpacking-one-of-newmans-gems/>
- ¹⁶ *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022, n.27.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. n.28.
- ¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Address to students and teachers from schools across Italy*, Rome, 10 May 2014.
- ¹⁹ Pope St John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, n.57.
- ²⁰ *Formation in Virtues: Educating the Whole Person*, Department of Catholic Education and Formation, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, London, April 2020, p.3.
- ²¹ *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022, n.29.
- ²² Pope St John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, n.63.
- ²³ *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022, n.29.
- ²⁴ Pope St John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, n.63.
- ²⁵ *The sign We Give*, Bishops Conference of England and Wales, Matthew James Publishing, 1995, p.20. ²⁶ *Flourishing Together*, Confederation of School Trusts, National Society for Education, Catholic Education Service, 2024, p.4.
- ²⁷ *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 1967, n6; *Lumen Gentium*, n.11.
- ²⁸ Kasper, W. *Theology and the Church*, SCM Press, London, 1989, p.191.
- ²⁹ *To know you more clearly: The Religious Education Directory*, Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 2023, p.2.
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- ³¹ Ibid. n.799.
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- ³³ Congar, Y. OP, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Attwater, D, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 1957.
- ³⁴ Pope Francis, General Audience, Rome 27 October 2021.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n.279.

³⁷ *Male and Female He Created Them*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2019, n.40. St John Henry Newman



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