



## **Greetings for Catholic Schools Week 2021**

On March 12<sup>th</sup> last, I was visiting a school, when the news broke that schools were to close that evening in an effort to contain the spread of the Coronavirus. Although, there had been rumours, the atmosphere was surreal as the school community began to process what was actually happening. Little did we think that it would be over five months before our schools would reopen again. Nor would we have imagined that when they did reopen, new safety practices would bring with them such profound changes to every day school life.

We had hoped that a New Year would bring a new start – but that was not to be either. The schools are closed again. Kitchen tables have become classrooms again. Mammies and Daddies now supervise; check and correct work. Teacher after teacher make valiant efforts to direct learning remotely. Long awaited Confirmations and First Confessions and First Communions have been postponed. Many have moved from Primary School to Secondary School or from Secondary to Third Level Education without the customary rites of passage brought by a graduation ceremony or class gathering. School sports and cultural events have been cancelled and even the Leaving Certificate Examinations had to adapt and change.

Against this backdrop, the celebration of Catholic School's Week 2021 takes on a unique shape and perhaps an even greater importance. At the heart of every Catholic School, Primary or Secondary, is the Good News of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of his message. Good News that tells us that no matter what – God is on our side. No matter what difficulties and challenges life brings – God is with us. Despite the worry, the upheaval, the new rules to be followed, the challenges of teaching from a distance, the difficulties of learning at home, the worry of whether or not the Leaving Certificate will take place – God will never abandon us. There are times when we will find it hard to find him and even harder to understand his

ways – but God is there always working for our ultimate good. We read in the Bible: “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” (Deut 31:8)

Catholic schools should always have a special regard for those in need. At this time, I am thinking in particular of our students who have additional needs and families who are struggling to manage these without the support and routine of school life. I hope and pray that some progress may be made, as soon as possible, so that these children may be able to once again avail of the in-school supports they so greatly deserve.

Albeit a challenge, I invite Catholic Schools throughout the Diocese of Clonfert to devote some time through their remote learning platforms to mark Catholic School’s week 2021. The “Thoughts for Each Day” and worksheets at [catholicschools.ie](http://catholicschools.ie) are a valuable resource. Perhaps you might like to invite your local Priest to deliver an online prayer or blessing. What about a short prayer at the beginning and end of the home-schooling day? Maybe you could organise an art, poetry or essay competition on the theme of the week: “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith and Resilience.” We would love to hear of how you get on!

I take this opportunity to thank our Boards of Management, Principals, Teachers, School, Staff, Pupils, Parents, Parents Associations, our Priests, the members of our Diocesan Education Secretariat - and all those who are involved in the noble vocation that is Catholic education throughout our Diocese.

Let me end, with the words of Amanda Gorman at President Biden’s Inauguration last week: “For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. if only we’re brave enough to be it.” (*The Hill We Climb*) I pray that our Catholic Schools will continue to BE a light to faith and resilience now and in the year to come. Amen.

✠ Michael Duignan  
Bishop of Clonfert

*Catholic Schools Week runs from 24<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Further information on Catholic Schools Week and resources for use in your school can be found at [www.catholicschools.ie](http://www.catholicschools.ie)*