**Archdiocese of Glasgow**

**Mass for Catholic Teachers & Support Staff 2019**

1. **My dear friends and co-workers in the great project of Catholic schooling in this Archdiocese and in Scotland, I am so pleased to see you again and to welcome you to St Andrew’s Cathedral for this Mass for Catholic Teachers and Support Staff. I welcome especially newly appointed Head Teachers and those of you who are newly qualified probationer teachers in your first assignment. I welcome you if you are at this Mass for the first time, and I welcome all of you who serve as teachers and support staff in the Catholic schools of this Archdiocese. As much as St Paul gave thanks for the infant Christian community at Thessalonika, I give thanks for our Catholic teachers.**
2. **I want to welcome in a special way our distinguished and very dear friends and colleagues from the Scottish Catholic Education Service, which provides so much support and wise guidance to us all, and which serves Catholic schools in Scotland so superbly. I welcome the delegation from the St Andrew’s Foundation at the University of Glasgow that provides our essential Initial Teacher Education for students who will become teachers in our Catholic schools. I welcome any and all other visitors to this Mass.**
3. **At the beginning of June, I participated as part of the SCES delegation in the World Congress of Catholic Schools that took place at Fordham University in New York over a period of 2-3 days. It was organised by the International Office for Catholic Education, which is associated with the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome, whose Secretary, Archbishop Angelo Zani, and other senior officials were present at the New York Congress.**
4. **There were about 2000 representatives present at the Congress from Catholic schools and diocesan education offices across the world: from USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Africa, Asia and the Far East, Europe Scandinavia and Russia – just about everywhere. It was good to see too how respected our SCES was in that company and at that level. We should be pleased that our Scottish Catholic Education Service has a considerable international profile.**
5. **Through all the diversity that was on show, there were some themes that were common across the world. These were: the Catholic identity of schools in pluralistic world; the formation of Catholic teachers; pressures from the secular world; the articulation of the mission of Catholic schools in a changing world and for ever more diverse pupil cohorts; and the relationship of Catholic schools to governmental bodies and structures, and to the local Church. You will readily see that that those same challenges and themes are present in our Catholic schools and in our education system, and they occupy our minds in trying to shape the future of Catholic schools in Scotland.**
6. **What emerged from these themes was that catholic schools across the world are generally good schools. They are much appreciated by their client groups, by governing bodies, local authorities and governments, and by the local Catholic Church. I always say that Catholic schools are and should be the jewel in the crown of the Catholic community in Scotland, and that appears to be a similar assessment from across the world.**
7. **You know what struck me forcefully? It was the statistic that across the world 63 million children and young people are educated in Catholic schools. Catholic schools are the largest providers of primary and secondary education in the world outside the governments of China and India. I was astonished to hear that. You know how we are often subjected to comments that suggest that Catholic schools are a social anomaly, that they are an outdated phenomenon, and that they have no place in a progressive society. These comments, so often repeated, sometimes put us on the defensive and make us apologetic about Catholic schools. But the evidence from across the world shows us clearly that these comments come from ignorance and small-mindedness, and we can safely ignore them.**
8. **So don’t feel you have to apologise for Catholic schools, don’t feel you have to apologise for being a Catholic teacher. Your profession and vocation is honoured all round the world, and you are part of a world-wide cohort of teachers who are making a difference to children and young people on a global scale. That is a service and a gift of inestimable value to communities and to societies, to countries and to the entire world. Well done, my dear friends and co-workers. I encourage you to be confident Catholic teachers.**
9. **I must just tell you one last thing about that Congress. I went along to one of the workshops. I was glad I did. A Lecturer from Notre Dame University (Indiana), which has an amazing programme for the formation of Catholic teachers, led the workshop. The Lecturer himself, a Dr D’Agostino, was inspiring. He summed up his address in this way. Catholic teachers need to love children, be the best educators they can be, and their professional lives as educators must be one with their discipleship and life of faith, which is a theme very near to my heart.**
10. **So, my dear friends, as you return to your schools and pupils for the new school year, be of good heart, know that the Lord continues to call you, and that the Church loves and appreciates you. Go back to your pupils and do great things for them and for Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**St Andrew’s Cathedral, Glasgow**

**26th August 2019**