



Celebrating Catholic Schools Week 2016 in Your Parish

Catholic Schools: Challenged to Proclaim God's Mercy

Catholic Schools Week 2016 begins on Sunday, 31 January, the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. We are now in the eighth year of such a celebration, and the need to publicly value, acknowledge and celebrate the excellent education that happens in our faith-based schools has never been so apparent. Our faith-based schools are the subject of much debate and discussion in the media, and often the conversation is ill-informed and dismissive of the important role that our schools play in creating the kind of inclusive society that is sought by all well-meaning people. It is therefore important that we take every opportunity to support, articulate and showcase the excellent work done in our Catholic schools.

One of the most appropriate places to do this is as we gather as a worshipping community at the beginning of Catholic Schools Week. There are obviously myriad ways in which parishes might choose to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, and the following are just some suggestions that might help.

Sunday, 31 January

Celebration of the Eucharist for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The parish liturgy group will obviously be very useful in helping to prepare for this Mass. Encourage them to make Catholic Schools Week part of the annual life of the parish. It will always begin on the last Sunday in January.

Planning Meeting

Arrange a meeting with the principals and teachers of primary and post-primary schools in the weeks prior to Catholic Schools Week and discuss the various ways that the theme of Catholic Schools Week can be highlighted and celebrated during the liturgy on 31 January. If your parish does not have a Catholic post-primary school, consider how you might best involve students from your parish who attend post-primary schools in neighbouring parishes. Is your parish participating in the Pope John Paul II Awards and could the students preparing for awards or the awards leader be part of this planning meeting? Include a member of your parish liturgy group in this meeting.

The Mass

Word of Welcome and Explanation

This might include a few words about the theme of Catholic Schools Week 2016, which is **Catholic Schools: Challenged to Proclaim God's Mercy**.

Opening Procession

It may be appropriate to have an Opening Procession on this Sunday. This could include symbols that represent schools as places of both faith and learning service in your Catholic schools. If a display area has been set up in the church to mark Catholic Schools Week this is the ideal place to put the symbols presented in the Opening Procession.

Music

Consider involving children/staff in the music during the Liturgy. A group of children might sing the Psalm and intone the Gospel Acclamation.



Liturgy of the Word

The readings, Prayers of the Faithful etc. for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time can be found in the December/January edition of Intercom. Tá siad le fáil as Gaeilge san áit céanna. There are also homily notes for this Sunday in the January edition of The Furrow.

As this is the parish celebration of the Sunday Eucharist it is appropriate that the usual Minister of the Word scheduled to read does so. This gives a visible sign of the Sunday Eucharist as a place where we are all nourished to go back to our communities of home and school and continue to announce the Gospel. Include a Prayer of the Faithful for Catholic schools and their work. Some young people might be invited to compose and read these prayers.

Preparation of the Altar and Presentation of the Gifts

Consider inviting representatives from the three communities of home, school and parish to prepare the altar table and to present the gifts of bread and wine. This will be a visible reminder of the need for all three groups to work together so that we might all witness to the Gospel values that we profess as members of the Church.

Hospitality

This would be a good time to offer hospitality after Mass. Perhaps the Parents Association and other local groups would come together to coordinate this.

Catholic Schools: Challenged to Proclaim God's Mercy

Parish Newsletter

Ensure that Catholic Schools Week is brought to the attention of the wider community by placing a note in the parish newsletter. Include specific public activities planned in your parish. Sample text might read as follows:

Sunday, 31 January marks the beginning of Catholic Schools Week 2016. During this week we aim to celebrate the unique contribution that Catholic schools, both primary and post-primary, make to the mission of the Church in our local faith communities and throughout the wider church. This year's theme is **Catholic Schools: Challenged to Proclaim God's Mercy**.

Pupils from the parish schools might distribute the newsletter at Mass.

Display Area

Consider working with the school to create a display showing the ways in which the parish schools are actively living out their mission of service.

Boards of Management/Governors

Put Catholic Schools Week 2016 on the agenda for your next meeting. Use the resource for staff and boards of management/governors to reflect on the theme for this year. This resource is available for download at www.catholicschools.ie.



The Pastoral Council

Bring Catholic Schools Week to the attention of the Pastoral Council and ask them how the parish might best celebrate it this year. Consider using the extract 'Catholic Schools: Building Community' from *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis* to enable a discussion about the role of Catholic schools and how they might be better supported by the faith community.

The chaplain might take the opportunity this week to visit as many classrooms as possible. The Catholic Schools Week resource will help you to find a focus for your visit as it offers a theme for each day's work.

Encourage schools to participate in Grandparents' Day on 3 February.

Prayer in Catholic Schools Week 2016

There are resources for prayer times to open and close Catholic Schools Week available on www.catholicschools.ie. You will also find a Prayer Service for Grandparents' Day on this site.