

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to share the energy of Catholic Schools Day as Catholic primary and secondary schools of New Zealand have sent in information, photos and descriptions of the activities that have taken place. Thank you all so much. As reflected in your activities it has been a time for rejoicing, for expressing gratitude for all those who have built Catholic education in this country over 150 years, for building our unity as schools joined with each other, of prayer as you took part in liturgies and Masses, and of sharing with those in need.

It is heartwarming to be part of the enthusiasm, energy, gratitude and spirituality that the day has generated. The fortuitous timing meant that Pentecost featured in many celebrations – what better symbol for Catholic education?

This edition also contains two articles from schools that have been putting much time and energy into encouraging children (and their families) to attend Sunday Mass. This emphasis is at the heart of the Catholic school whose task is, of course, to participate in the evangelising mission of the Church. We hope in future editions to bring you more examples of schools and parishes working together to evangelise children and teenagers and strengthen their sense of discipleship.

We know that our Bishops are grateful for everything that schools do to enable their students to encounter the living God, grow in knowledge and form a deep and lasting relationship with Christ and his Church. May the blessing of Catholic Schools Day spread into every day in schools and their parishes.

The Silver Bullet

Shelly Fitness, DRS, St Patrick's School, Taupo

At every Catholic school I visit, from every Catholic teacher I speak to and from every priest I talk with comes the same question. What is the silver bullet that will get more of our Catholic school families along to Mass on Sundays?

Everyone seems to have an answer... there could be music more suited to children, the priests could make their sermons shorter, if children attend Mass on a Sunday they could receive a lollipop at school on Monday... and at our school we have certainly tried a gamut of ideas.

Over the past four years we have tried everything from colouring competitions to shared morning teas after Mass, from getting the children to wear crowns on the feast of Christ the King, to getting them to wear their uniform and sit with their teachers, from Andrew Chinn music to children's choirs and musicians. And what we've found, similar to schools up and down the country, is that the children will come for these 'gimmicks', they will come to a school Mass on a Sunday, but then they won't be there the next week or the week after that. The challenge our parish priest put to us this year is how can we get our families along to Mass **every** weekend?

We are incredibly lucky at our school to have a very keen Special Character committee made up of our tagged teachers, our principal, our parish priest and three dedicated Catholic parents. We meet twice a term and last term our focus was the question of how we can get our families to want to be there on a Sunday. The first question we had to ask was why aren't they there already?

After asking around, it turns out that the children actually want to come. They would love to be at Mass every week. So why aren't the parents bringing them? Answers were all variations on a theme, "It's too boring", "Sunday is a family day for us", "Sunday is the only day I get off work", "We sleep in and take Sunday easy", "I just don't get anything out of it".

We then asked about why other parents are faithful attendees. The answer was simple. They attend because they believe in it, it's part of their faith and they understand the significance of the Eucharist. So how, then, to bridge this gap? This is the true battle – it's not about how to get families along to Sunday Mass, it's more about how to instil and grow faith in our families.

We believe that this has to be a joint approach – not just an attempt by us at school, but a joint approach with the parish as well. We hope to meet with the parish council in the future to brainstorm some ideas. One of our non-Catholic parents has asked us to run a 'Catholicism for Dummies' course – an idea we think has huge merit and that we are hoping will get off the ground in the next term. In the last year, one of our Special Character Committee mothers has started both a youth group and a toddlers' music group – both are opportunities to evangelise and water that seed of faith.

This change in focus, away from enticing people to Mass with gimmicks and towards growing people's faith and understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist holds great hope for us. Only time will tell if we have been effective.





Catholic Schools Day 2013 – Ngā Taonga – Living the Treasure

Activities around the country are shown in the photographs that fill this edition of Good News and the News – and they certainly reveal that our schools are living the treasure! Below is a sample of some of the many events that took place.

In the Auckland diocese, as throughout the country, many schools and colleges joined together for Mass, liturgies, and shared lunch and activities themed to the day. St Mary's Northcote parish treated students and staff to cake, while students at McAuley High School donated food for a food basket for an elderly person. St Joseph's Pukekohe set up a display on the perimeter fence advertising the day. St Francis Xavier School Whangarei released homing pigeons and a logo with the plume of education.

In Palmerston North diocese Our Lady of Lourdes Palmerston North let off 63 helium balloons in the school colours, one for every year of its life. St Peter's College, also in Palmerston North, loaded the mission van with home baking and distributed it to parish offices, the hospital, hospice, police, ambulance, fire station, St Vincent de Paul and diocesan offices. St Joseph's Waipukurau held a coin trail with the money to be distributed to children in need, created a paper quilt, and visited the Pukeora 'Forest of Memories' where they discussed how to support this project through prayer and practical activities. Hastings schools St Joseph's and St John's College released white balloons as a symbol of peace; the St Joseph's children designed feathers made into a cloak worn by the youngest child, and their focus on Catholic heritage was shown through photos of the faith journey of the principal, Mrs O'Connor, from her First Holy Communion onwards. See DRS Kelly Beal's blog at <http://mrsbealssjsblogspot.com> (Special Events section) for a wonderful set of photos. (This whole blog is a real treasure worth emulating.) Napier schools were hosted at Sacred Heart College and Wanganui schools, St Matthew's Marton and St Joseph's Patea celebrated a city-wide Mass then were hosted at Cullinane College. Taranaki schools took out a feature

page in the local newspaper and brought 700 children together for Mass and activities.

In Wellington Archdiocese many schools engaged in joint activities. Holy Cross Miramar, St Anthony's Seatoun and St Patrick's Kilbirnie filled treasure chests with photos on which children had recorded their gifts and talents, and these were part of the Offertory procession at Mass. Garin College Nelson launched its annual 'Can drive' for the Vinnies Food Bank. Wairarapa schools celebrated in Masterton.

On the West Coast five schools brought 400 students together for Mass.

In Christchurch St Bernadette's Christchurch concluded their day with a fun family religious education night; children at St Peter's Beckenham wore "hot" colours to celebrate Pentecost, and brought a gold coin for Caritas; St Joseph's Ashburton and Our Lady of the Snows Methven celebrated Mass and then spent the day in a range of service activities in the community. Catholic Cathedral College Christchurch had a liturgy of thanksgiving for the Religious Orders who have given their all to Catholic education in New Zealand.

In Southland 1000 pupils from 7 schools met for Mass in Invercargill, and then split up for activities and games led by Verdon College senior students. In Gore, Oamaru and Dunedin students gathered also. At St Mary's Mosgiel the Young Vinnies organised children to bring a gift for the local food bank.

In all – a wonderful day. Thank you!



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St Joseph's School Port Chalmers and St Mary's Star of the Sea Parish - building a successful School/Parish relationship.

Tom Woodhouse, Principal, St Joseph's School, Port Chalmers, Dunedin

The recent external review of our Catholic Special Character contains the following finding:

“The decision to have a weekly Mass is a deliberate decision to engage students with the sacramental opportunities available through parish life and Saturday (Sunday vigil) Mass. The work of the school in this area is exceptional.....few schools have such commitment from staff around the parish-school relationship.”

This is a comment that we find both gratifying and humbling. Gratifying because it acknowledges the time, effort and determination which has gone into making it this far and humbling because we know that we still have a distance to go.

In trying to build a strong relationship between the parish and the school we have had some great wins and a few losses, but what we have developed over this time is a Mass that appeals to almost everyone. Hopefully our experiences will help other schools on their own journey.

In the past the parish used an overhead projector for its weekly Mass and when there was a school liturgy the school would set up a data projector, both options being clumsy and time consuming to organise. In 2010 the school was the driving force behind the purchase of a T.V. monitor, laptop and suitable sound system. The cost was less than \$3000. The installation of this equipment changed the structure of the parish's Liturgy Group and their thinking about the presentation of the Mass. In the early days this required a significant amount of faith and trust in the school's vision but within a very short period of time the support and encouragement was overwhelming. Going back to using the overhead projector was unthinkable.

The introduction of this technology (which our students were already familiar with) allowed the school to use the church every morning for child-led prayer. As a result our students are familiar with, and comfortable within the church. We wanted them to feel that the church was “their place”, a place of safety and comfort, and they do.

In addition to daily morning prayer in the church they also attend the mid-week Mass every Wednesday morning. Again, this was a deliberate decision to ensure that the children were familiar with, and understood the ritual of the Mass. Sometimes our students are the only attendees, at other times we are joined by several other members of the parish. It doesn't matter. Similarly, sometimes we have a priest and sometimes we don't, in which case we have a Liturgy of the Word without a Priest. The use of the church every day is the foundation stone for the children forming a connection to the parish, the routines and the rituals.

The school communicates with the coordinator of the Liturgy roster to schedule a school Mass twice each term. On these occasions

the school leads the whole Mass - choosing and practising the songs, rehearsing readings, preparing and delivering Prayers of the Faithful and facilitating the collection and offertory. Students enjoy giving the gift of a vibrant Mass to our parish community and in return they are generous in their praise and encouragement. We have consistently found that our children like the responsibility of being involved and very seldom let us down. The fact that they are familiar with the church and with the Mass helps considerably (and provides a great opportunity to invite proud parents along too).

By offering the school's ICT skills every Mass arrangement is formatted into a PowerPoint presentation and draws upon a solid library of carefully selected images, hymns and Mass parts. This digital format regularly receives positive comments. We have found that the children and their parents respond best to the colourful presentation of the Mass, and the less familiar participants appreciate the prompting for how to respond next in the Mass. In many ways it makes the Mass more accessible to all.

Talking with parents each week (and often contacting them on the weekend) to encourage them to come to Mass is much easier in a small school but emphasises the importance of a personal invitation to attend. I think we sometimes underestimate how critical it is for parents to feel that it makes a difference when they do.

We have also experimented with intrinsic rewards to encourage the children to attend Mass and some of these have been more successful than others. Organising a school event, such as a movie night or disco, to precede or follow the school Mass is the most successful method of getting children there and for them to connect with the parish. Again this integrates the Mass into the life of the school, making it an extension of our activities - not something separate and independent from us.

On Mondays we are keen on identifying those children who were there at the weekend Mass referring to them as “our weekend angels”. We have also trialled a small incentive to come along on the weekend - a goodie bag with a verse themed bookmark, a lollipop, balloon etc. Interestingly the novelty wore off quite quickly but attendance remained relatively high even when the treat bags stopped.

Not everything you try is going to work first time, or at all, and recognising and accepting this helps to achieve the end goal. In making the Mass accessible and relevant to our students and their parents, we needed to be mindful that the church was already home to a loyal and passionate parish community, many of whom enjoyed the Mass the way it was. Through positive lines of communication both the school and the parish have successfully come together as one Church community.