



Education Sunday 14th September 2025



Catholic Education Service
Since 1847

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Foreword

The Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in establishing education in this country. The first schools and universities were set up during the sixth century by the Church. One of the first schools specifically for girls, the Bar Convent School, in York, now All Saints Catholic School, was founded by Sr Mary Ward and Catholic businessman Sir Thomas Gascoigne in 1686.

Education remains the largest charitable activity of the Church in this country, with many of our schools established for poor immigrant children in the 19th century. Our forebears rightly saw education as the principal means of handing on the faith and improving the spiritual, moral, social and cultural lives of children and young people.

Since then, the Catholic Church has become the country's largest provider of secondary schools and second-largest provider of primary schools, along with four universities.

Established by the Bishops in 1848, Education Sunday is one of the oldest Days of Special Prayer in the liturgical calendar of England and Wales.

Catholic schools continue to be true to their historical mission, in educating substantially more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds than other state-funded schools.

This success, however, continues to be dependent on the support of the Catholic community. There are many ways to do this, for instance in prayer for vocations to Catholic education; asking your diocese about becoming a school foundation governor; or encouraging a young person to become a teacher in a Catholic school.

We also give thanks for the many thousands of teachers, lecturers, academics, support staff, leaders, governors, directors, advisers and others who have found their vocation in Catholic education, and without whom this would be impossible.

Catholic education is a wonderful achievement to be celebrated - happy Education Sunday.

Paul Barber
Director of the Catholic Education Service

Overview

This year's theme for Education Sunday is drawn from its Gospel reading of John 3:13-17: *The Son of Man must be lifted up.*

It takes place this year on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Ten years ago the then-Holy Father, Pope Francis, said during his Mass for this feast that a Christian 'must lower himself, as Jesus lowered himself: this is the path of humility.'

Catholic education in Church schools and universities endeavours to acknowledge Jesus' loving presence in the lives of young people as they work, learn, pray, grow in character and virtue, and discover their vocation.

Education Sunday is an opportunity to showcase the works and fruits of this, especially locally. From a priest speaking in his homily about a local school, to pupils wearing their uniforms at Mass, Education Sunday can be the reminder to all members of the Catholic community of the importance of education to the Catholic mission.

Dioceses rely on the generosity of the Catholic community each Education Sunday to support education in the diocese and the work of the Catholic Education Service. This makes Education Sunday a key event in the annual Catholic calendar.

Celebrating schools in church this Education Sunday

Holy Mass on Education Sunday is a wonderful opportunity for churches and parishes to celebrate Catholic schools. Here are some ways in which this can be done:

- Encouraging pupils from Catholic schools to wear their school uniforms to Mass
- Going through the Sunday's readings, the psalms and the bidding prayers with pupils
- Devising their own bidding prayers
- Arranging for pupils to gather the second collection at Mass
- Placing students' art or crafts in the church, church hall or other prominent place
- Having a student-led bake-sale in the church hall after Mass
- Arranging for pupils to come into church with their school banner
- Having a teacher or pupil read out the second collection appeal
- Having pupils present the gifts of bread and wine at the preparation of the gifts
- Including the school choir

Some questions to reflect upon for the appeal:

- What has my experience of Catholic education been?
- What are my favourite parts of the school I am involved in?
- What are the core values that drive my school?
- Do you feel like Catholic education makes a difference? How?
- What are the connections between my school and the parish?
- What inspires me in my work?

This list is not exhaustive, and features of particular schools could be identified and celebrated. Additionally, schools may wish to invite staff and volunteers to Mass, including teachers, teaching assistants, playground or home-time volunteers.

Reflection

The following reflection is by Fleur Dorrell, Biblical Apostolate Manager for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in partnership with the Bible Society. For further activities and resources on the Scriptures, visit www.godwhospeaks.uk

All the Scripture readings on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross draw on powerful images of being 'lifted up'. In John's gospel, Jesus says, 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.' *John 3:14-15*. He is referring to an incident in Numbers 21:4-9 when the Israelites hurried towards the Red Sea. They had complained against God, had been punished by an infestation of snakes and some had died. God instructed Moses to raise up a bronze snake in the wilderness and all those who turned to it were healed and saved. It became a visual and prophetic symbol of Jesus' crucifixion. When Jesus was lifted high on a cross, he would offer universal salvation and eternal life through his death.

In Philippians 2:4-11, the apostle Paul describes Jesus as being 'highly exalted' by God after his humiliation and execution on the cross. Jesus' subsequent exaltation at the right hand of the Father and his nomination with the name above all names as 'Christ and Lord' is one of the earliest references to his divinity. It is all the more remarkable in suggesting that God chose to become human, entered into the world and experienced death - transforming it as a place where divinity and hope can be met. The lifting up of Jesus in resurrection and ascension then becomes the fruit of so great a self-emptying love. Death is no longer the end but a transition into the divine life.

The Letter to the Philippians is an early fragment of a Christian hymn in one of the earliest Christian texts. It tells us that Jesus emptied himself out of humility, even to death on a cross. This Letter takes us into the heart of the Gospel and the pattern of Jesus' life and ministry. It offers a permanent challenge to all forms of self-assertion and personal power-seeking in every age.

The ways we celebrate this Feast Day shows our reverence for Jesus:

As we enter the Church, we are reminded of how Christ received and accepted us in baptism in our gestures of signing ourselves with his cross and holy water.

By bowing at Jesus' holy name, crossing our forehead, lips and heart as we wait to hear his Gospel, we invite his words and life to become our words and life.

Kneeling as Christ comes among us in the sacrament of his presence and reverently receiving him into our body at Communion, we become one with him.

Every time Christ's life is raised up for all to look to him, we pray that he will be seen, and our world will be healed. May we be witnesses to this truth in our daily faith and actions.

Questions for further exploration:

How are we lifted up in our schools?

Who lifts us up and who can we lift up?

How can we serve God by lifting up his name this week?

Where else is Jesus being lifted up at home and in our communities?

Can we recognise the signs of these and give thanks for God's glory in this world?

Let us lift each other up in confident faith. That we know who the Son of Man is and we know that through him we have eternal life.

Suggested music for listening to or singing:

On Eagle's Wings, by Michael Joncas, 1977.

If you'd like to know more about our national God who Speaks initiative and to share ideas, activities and resources on the Scriptures, go to: www.godwhospeaks.uk

Liturgy

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Reading 1: Numbers 21: 4b-9

'If anyone were bitten by a serpent, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.'

Psalm: Psalm 78(77): 1-2. 34-35. 36-38. R. cf:7b

Never forget the deeds of the Lord!

Reading 2: Philippians 2:6-11

'He humbled himself, therefore God has highly exalted him.'

Acclamation before the Gospel:

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Gospel: John 3:13-17

'The Son of Man must be lifted up.'

Quotes about education

Here are some quotes about education which may be of use in preparing homilies for Education Sunday.

Pope Leo XIV

From his address to the Christian Brothers, 15 May, 2025:

"The charism of the school ... besides being a service to society and a precious work of charity, still appears today as one of the most beautiful and eloquent expressions of that priestly, prophetic, and royal munus [public service] which we all received in Baptism, as emphasised by the documents of the Second Vatican Council."

Pope Francis

From his address to the participants of the plenary assembly of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, 21 November, 2024:

"Educational models that aim merely to produce 'results' are useless in the absence of a cultural vision capable of forming persons prepared to help the world change gears by eliminating inequality, endemic poverty and exclusion."

Pope Benedict XVI

From his message in celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2012:

"...the first step in education is learning to recognize the Creator's image in man, and consequently learning to have a profound respect for every human being and helping others to live a life consonant with this supreme dignity."

St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

From her address to the Educational Standing Committee of the German Catholic Federation of Women, 11 November, 1930:

"Thus we come back to the concept that religious education is the most important component of education. The most urgent duty is to open the child's path to God. Thus we can also say that to be formed religiously one must have living faith. To have living faith means to know God, to love Him, to serve Him."

St Thérèse of Lisieux

From The Story Of A Soul, 1898:

"True charity consists in bearing all our neighbour's defects – not being surprised at their weakness, but edified at their smallest virtues."

Bidding prayers

Here are some prayer suggestions. Alternatively, pupils could write their own prayers.

We bring together our prayers to the Lord for the needs of the Church and of the world.

We pray that world leaders may be guided to see education as a source of hope for the future.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all children around the world; that they may have the chance to change their lives for the better through education and look to the future with hope and happiness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray that as a church family who are starting the new term together, we will all work hard to look after each other, particularly those who most need our care.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our school and all Catholic schools and universities in our area. We give thanks for the dedication, example and inspiration of school leaders, teachers and all who contribute to nurturing and supporting children and young people. May our school communities be filled with Jesus' compassion and love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For all who are sick, particularly those attending or working in our schools and universities, may they be restored to fullness of health or come to know dignity in their suffering.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have recently died, including those whose anniversaries are at this time.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant, we pray, O Lord,
that what your people ask in fitting prayer
they may receive by your mercy.
Through Christ our Lord.

Social media guide

The following tips can help your school and parish use social media for Education Sunday and beyond.

If your school doesn't have a social media account, for example with X (formerly Twitter), or Bluesky, Facebook and Instagram, it only takes a few minutes to set one up. However, please ensure your content, especially all photos of children, is in line with your online safety policy and that you apply appropriate security settings to your account.

This can be useful for promoting the work of the school and linking to other organisations. Posts are short and you can also include photos and videos.

- Use a brief and easy-to-remember handle.
- Put key information in the 'about' section – website and name of your school.
- Follow and post/repost people and schools who do similar work to your own.
- Follow the Catholic Education Service to find out what other Catholic schools are up to for Education Sunday. You can follow the Holy Father, bishops, cathedrals, parishes and more.
- Some other good accounts to follow are the local BBC news and your local newspaper. If you post lots of content about an interesting event at your school, a local journalist might decide to write a story about it.
- You can also follow the account of your local MP, who may wish to pay a visit to your school.
- Don't post too much, think about your audience, and make sure access to the account is secure.
- Make sure the content of your posts never reveals personal details of staff or students.
- Look at and use trending topic hashtags in your posts to reach a wider community.
- Don't forget to post about the religious aspects of your school - photos from Mass, collective worship or pilgrimages provide interesting content.
- If you have photo and video content people are much more likely to engage with it if it has a visual component and isn't just a sentence.
- Once your account is up and running, get ready to post about Education Sunday.
- Repost content, especially about Catholic education and school governance.
- You could get individual staff and students to post about why they love their Catholic school.
- Providing you have permission, post photos of all the events you run about Education Sunday.