

Secunder speech: GS2019: 18th May 2019

General Synod Board of Education (Republic of Ireland):

Your Grace,

In seconding the Report of the Boards of Education but specifically referring to the Republic of Ireland Board; I would like to take this opportunity to very briefly reflect on the role and context of our schools in the community. There are many aspects to life in the local community and parish. But we are mistaken and short-sighted if we do not value our role in our schools as a **core function of the mission of the church**. As a parish community, our school not only provides the parents in our congregations with a school of their own ethos for the education of their children, a right under Article 42 of the Constitution and Article 14 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, it also opens the way for other parents to choose an alternative faith-based ethos for their children. In this way we are contributing to the catering for pluralism and diversity in contemporary Irish society.

Our primary schools are embedded in towns and villages across the Republic of Ireland. Our second level schools, despite being few in number, have long been recognised as centres of educational excellence. Each school is justifiably proud of that moniker. **Here at General Synod it very appropriate that we collectively express our pride in our schools, both primary and secondary, and affirm them in the important work they do and the extremely important role they play** in the lives of their students, their parents, in the lives of all of us in the church and indeed in the life of Irish society generally.

On a wider national level, the involvement of the Church in education allows us an opportunity to play a formative role in the development of future generations of young people and to engage with Government and the State in a real and meaningful way. At a time when the evolving diversity of modern Ireland is giving voice to a strong secularist understanding of life, as opposed to a tolerant and pluralistic understanding of life, we, **as a church need to cherish and affirm our involvement in education and its importance to the communities in which we serve and whom we serve.**

So often, church involvement in education is characterised as the clerics seeking to control the formative years of young people. Yet, this General Synod displays that the Church of Ireland is a democratic Church and that leadership is collaborative. Schools are collaborative enterprises too!

When I think of any of the schools which I have been involved in over the course of my career I think of the students, the parents, the teachers, the SNA's, the school secretary, the school caretakers, the bus drivers, the school crossing personnel, the inspectors, the board members, both nominees and elected; and a myriad of various other people and organisations who make teaching and learning happen in our schools. **It is a collective and collaborative enterprise based on the shared understanding that we are all involved in education for the good of the child.**

Each child deserves the best possible education; and **the best education is rooted in values which orientate and ground the individual in that which is right and true.** It is an inherently good

thing that we, the Church community, understand both the value of that and that through our schools we live out the mandate and duty so beautifully expressed in psalm 78 that:

“The generations to come may set their hope in the Lord and not forget his works”

Your Grace I have pleasure in seconding the Report of the Boards of Education and also seconding the motion before you.