

## **LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK, 2015**

“It takes a village to raise a child”. Though both its form and its message have been contested, the meaning of this maxim seems clear (and acceptable) enough: A child is reared by its family – more likely by its extended family in traditional cultures – but it takes more than the capacities and resources of even the extended family to secure the child’s welfare and development.

An analogous maxim suggests itself: “It takes a church to raise a Catholic”. The child is born of its parents, already made in the image and likeness of God. S/he is re-born to supernatural life in the Sacrament of Baptism, incorporated in Christ Jesus, made a member of his Mystical Body, the Church. In the Providence of God, we are saved and sanctified, not as individuals, not in isolation, splendid or otherwise, but as a people, the People of God (see CCC, #781). We are saved and sanctified by Christ in, and through, the Church, which is our Mother and our Teacher, the means by which we are given life in Christ and the means by which life in Christ is nurtured within us.

The parents are the primary educators of the child and it is in “the domestic church”, “the church of the home”, the Catholic family, “the fundamental community or cell of the parish, the diocese and the universal Church (see, e.g., *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 414)”, that the young are reared “in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man (see *Luke 2:52*)”.

In raising their children, in teaching them the Faith, Catholic parents are supported by the Catholic school which thus supplements – but does not supplant - the Catholic home. There has been in Ireland, and there still is, an ecclesiastical dimension to this relationship between Catholic home and Catholic school. Many of our Catholic primary schools were established, governed, conducted and funded, precisely as parish schools. They were, in their origins in the nineteenth century, the means chosen by the parish to provide for the religious formation and education of the young. Religious Instruction was provided in many chapels the length and breadth of Ireland by the clergy but also by the lay members of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine who, before and/or after Sunday Mass, taught the catechism to the children of the parish. As the century progressed, as the education system itself became increasingly denominationalised, the school became the preferred instrument by means of which the parish met its responsibilities for catechesis and, notwithstanding recommendations that this historical process be reversed, largely remains so to this day.

Today, it seems, it may be only through the Catholic school that some families come in anything like regular contact with the Church. With, perhaps, the home less and less a “church” for more and more, the Catholic school must do what it can and may to become itself a “church”, the “church of the school”, “the scholastic church”, a two-way link between the “domestic church”, the “church of the home”, and the parish, the diocese, the Church, the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ.

During Catholic Schools’ Week 2015, all involved in Catholic education, including, notwithstanding historical circumstances and present challenges, Catholic post-primary schools, Community & Comprehensive, ETB (especially designated community colleges) and Voluntary Secondary, might review and re-new their links with the Church at all levels, establishing and/or enhancing these links as a necessary constituent of their identity and integrity as, precisely and specifically, Catholic.