

Anti-racist Wales

Consultation Response to the Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Introduction

- The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) is the national permanent assembly of Catholic Bishops and Personal Ordinaries in the two member countries. The CBCEW represents the whole Catholic community in the 22 dioceses across England and Wales, with three of those dioceses within Wales.
- The Catholic Church in Wales comprises the Diocese of Wrexham, the Diocese of Menevia and the Archdiocese of Cardiff. Their combined 181 parishes serve a Catholic population of around 200,000, making Catholicism one of the largest faiths in Wales.
- The Catholic Bishops' Conference commissions five agencies to undertake specialist work on behalf of the bishops. These are the Catholic Education Service (CES), the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), the Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), Missio and Stella Maris.
- The Catholic Church is a partner of Welsh Government, providing schools as well as other services such as hospitals, prisons and port chaplaincy across Wales. Some local Catholic charities work alongside their local authorities or with Welsh Government to provide services.
- There is significant cultural, ethnic, age, disability, sex, sexuality and gender diversity within Catholic communities across Wales.
- More than 30% of pupils in Wales's 82 state-funded Catholic schools are from an ethnic minority background, compared to 12.5% in all other schools.

Human Dignity and Racial Justice

Promoting the dignity of every human person is a central pillar of Catholic Social Teaching. Any form of racism or discrimination directly opposes Church teaching:

The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.¹

Every year, as part of the Church's work on anti-racism, the Church marks Racial Justice Sunday in February; a day of reflection, prayer, education and celebration. This year's theme was 'walking together, working together and praying together'. Resources from this year and previous years can be found [here](#). They have been created to be used throughout the year.

The Catholic Church in England and Wales appoints a Lead Bishop for Racial Justice. The current Lead is Bishop Paul McAleenan. On Racial Justice Sunday in 2021, he made a statement saying:

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (118).

Every single one of our parishes, schools and organisations has a responsibility to actively practise anti-racism in all aspects of our mission.²

The Catholic Church welcomes Welsh Government's goal to tackle racism in Wales through the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan. We recognise the important role that we can play through our parishes, schools, charities, outreach and chaplaincy work in implementing the Plan.

A Nation of Sanctuary – A Catholic Perspective

Migration enriches our culture, parishes, and communities. We are a universal Church, and this is reflected across Wales where many of those sitting in the pews or caring for parishes are migrants. It is important that we celebrate this diversity as well as the vital practical contributions made by many Catholic charities such as Caritas, The Jesuit Refugee Service, Stella Maris and the Society of St Vincent De Paul in upholding the dignity of migrants and refugees. We welcome any continued efforts by Welsh Government to engage with local Church charities as well as parish and diocesan initiatives to build a genuine welcome through its Nation of Sanctuary work.

Caring for people on the move has always been an important aspect of how Catholics live out their faith. Last year, the Welsh and English bishops released [*Love the Stranger*](#), a document that practically applies Church teaching on migrants and refugees to today's context. It sets out 24 principles on how society, government and communities should respond to those who arrive on our shores. It calls on politicians not to allow "the concerns that some communities might have about migration to be exploited for political purposes or allow such concerns to develop into a xenophobic attitude".³

The Vatican has also called upon governments to "enact policies that promote hospitality within the local communities, and which actively seek to welcome and integrate migrants into the local community."⁴

Catholic Schools – An Inclusive Ethos

We recognise the integral role that education plays in tackling discrimination. Every Catholic school has an inclusive ethos at its heart. Catholic schools in Wales are more ethnically diverse than the national average and welcome families of all faiths and none. They also often serve families from more underprivileged backgrounds than the national average and yet produce results that are often higher than the national average. Three Catholic schools contributed to Estyn's 2021 document titled *The teaching of Welsh history including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture* due to their school demographics, expertise and inclusive projects. Within the document, it states:

In Our Lady and St. Michael's Catholic Primary School in Abergavenny, Filipino pupils speak with pride and excitement about the opportunity that the school provides to lead whole school assemblies about

² <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/racial-justice/racial-justice-sunday/racial-justice-sunday-2021/bishops-message-for-racial-justice-sunday-2021/>

³ <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/CBCEW-Love-the-Stranger-A4.pdf> (p. 6).

⁴ https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/stocktaking_holy_see.pdf (p.8).

the Philippines. Other pupils express how these events have given them opportunities to learn more about the history and culture of their classmates.⁵

GRT Community - Catholic schools are unique in the way in which they can support the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities because of the cultural and historic links they have with the Catholic faith. In recognition of this, we have undertaken research in Catholic schools that serve a higher-than-average number of GRT pupils to gain a deeper understanding of GRT experiences in the Catholic education sector in particular. Our evidence was collected through individual interviews with headteachers of Catholic schools as well as the National Catholic Chaplain for the GRT community. Using CES Census data, we also sent out a questionnaire to Catholic schools that serve a higher-than-average number of GRT pupils. This research has now fed into a guidance document for schools called [*Made in God's Image: Supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils in Catholic Schools*](#). This document addresses barriers to inclusion, ways to celebrate the GRT community at school, as well as how to address absences, and barriers to higher and early years education.

Linking Network – The Linking Network's [Schools Linking](#) project seeks to provide young people with the opportunity to explore identity, build connections and strengthen communities. They do this by pairing up two carefully matched classes from demographically different schools through a carefully planned year-long programme. Whilst this charity is secular, a very large number of Catholic schools in England are signed up and paired with schools of other social, ethnic, faith or geographical backgrounds. The Linking Network's projects have grown from strength to strength as more schools have recognised the positive impact class pairing has made on pupils' perceptions of race, religion and cultural backgrounds.

The aims of the Schools Linking project mirror many of the principles of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan including the importance of education in combatting racism and bringing communities together. The Catholic Church and the Linking Network have shared meetings with officials working on the Action Plan and are keen to explore ways to bring the Schools Linking project to Wales. Following the positive experiences English Catholic schools have had with the project, we would be interested in using a selection of ethnically diverse Catholic schools as pilots for this project.

We would welcome the opportunity to showcase the work being undertaken in Catholic schools to foster inclusive environments to the Equality and Social Justice Committee as well as to Welsh Government. We are looking forward to future meetings with Welsh Government officials on how the Schools Linking project could be used in Wales to benefit Welsh learners.

Partners with Welsh Government

- We encourage the Equality and Social Justice Committee to engage with our work and expertise across our schools, parishes and charities and hope to work in partnership with Welsh Government during the implementation of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.
- We have appreciated our discussions with officials working on the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan in relation to our proposed work with the Linking Network and look forward to exploring how this project can be realised.

⁵ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/book/print/pdf/20673> (p. 37).