

**A LETTER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC
YEAR 2025 - 2026**

Amare Filios Dei
“Love God’s Children”

Issued by:

Reverend Father David S. Khan

Episcopal Vicar for Education and

Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic Education Board of Management

To be read and shared throughout all Catholic primary and secondary educational institutions in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

I. GREETING IN THE LORD

To all who share in the noble vocation of Catholic education: clergy and religious, school principals and vice-principals, educators and catechists, administrative and support staff, parents, benefactors, and students,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 1:2).

With deep pastoral solicitude, I address you at the beginning of this new academic year, urging you to pause and meditate anew on the sacred mission entrusted to each of us: to **love God’s children**. This summons is drawn directly from the heart of Christ and from the very essence of the Gospel. In the light of the Lord’s parable of the barren fig tree (Lk 13:6-9), we are reminded that each child is planted by the Father in the garden of our care. Their growth is neither automatic nor incidental. It demands patient tending, persistent hope, and the unwavering love of those who serve in the vineyard of education.

“Sir, leave it alone for one more year... If it bears fruit next year, well and good” (Lk 13:8-9).

This image becomes for us a pastoral lens through which we view our work. The fruitfulness of the children and youth entrusted to our care depends not solely on their natural abilities or circumstances, but upon our fidelity in nurturing their God-given potential.

II. THE IMPERATIVE OF THIS HOUR: *AMARE FILIOS DEI*

The central theme of this academic year is a clarion call: **Love God's Children**. This is no sentimentality. It is the Gospel mandate lived within the context of the school. As the Holy Father, Pope Francis, teaches:

“To love with the same freedom and generosity that God has for each of His children is the core of the Christian life” (*Christus Vivit*, 239).

Let each day in our Catholic schools begin with this interior examination:

- Do I truly love God's children?
- Do I see them with the eyes of Christ?
- Am I forming them into joyful missionary disciples?

Such questions must guide our pedagogy, discipline, formation, and service. Love is not ancillary to our mission. It is its very foundation.

III. MY MISSION AND VISION AS VICAR OF EDUCATION

Mission

To serve as a faithful steward of Catholic education, ensuring that all students experience holistic formation that prioritises their spiritual, intellectual, moral, and emotional development. Each child must be placed at the centre of every policy, plan, and program. Rooted in Christ and faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, Catholic education must be a work of participation, communion and mission that is, collaborative, faithful, and fruitful.

Vision

To see every Catholic school in the Archdiocese become a *locus theologicus*, a visible sign of the Church's love for her children, where Christ is encountered daily, where no child is overlooked, and where holiness, wisdom, and mission flourish together.

This vision finds deep resonance in the words of the Second Vatican Council:

“The human person has a right to education... True education is directed toward the formation of the human person in view of his [or her] final end” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1).

IV. ECCLESIAL FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR TASK

1. The Sacred Dignity of Every Child

The Church teaches that the dignity of the human person is foundational to all educational efforts:

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1700).

“God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31).

2. Integral Human Formation

Education in the Catholic tradition is more than academic. It is a work of evangelisation:

“Education is integral to the Church’s mission. It is a form of evangelisation and transmission of culture” (*Educating Today and Tomorrow*, §4).

3. Love as the Foundation of Pedagogy

All true education is animated by the love of Christ:

“Charity requires that education be inspired by the image of the person as revealed in the mystery of Christ” (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, §9).

4. The Call to Bear Fruit That Will Last

Christ declares:

“I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16).

V. THE SYNODAL PATH IN EDUCATION

As we journey toward a more synodal Church, our educational mission must be shaped by the four marks of synodality: **Relating, Listening, Discerning, and Self-Emptying**.

Relating: Building communion through Christ-centred relationships

- Strengthen ties between home, school, and parish
- Foster spiritual and human encounters
- Accompany students with pastoral attentiveness

Listening: Hearing with the ears of the heart

- Promote student voice in school governance
- Train all staff in the art of pastoral and empathetic listening

Discerning: Reading the signs of the Spirit together

- Ground decisions in prayer, reflection, and Catholic Social Teaching
- Encourage reflective staff formation practices

Self-Emptying: Leading through humble service

- Embrace leadership that serves first
- Prioritise the poor and those at risk

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mk 9:35).

VI. “THE GARDENER”: THE VOCATION OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Parents

You are the first and most vital educators of your children. Your home is the first school, your witness the first lesson, your love the first truth. The Church honours your vocation and walks beside you.

“Every person... has an inalienable right to an education” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1).

Just as the gardener in the parable does not abandon the tree, so too are you called to persevere in love, discipline, correction, and encouragement. Holiness is formed in the ordinary rhythms of family life: in patience, forgiveness, and fidelity.

Teachers and Educators

I echo the words of Pope Francis, written during the pandemic:

“To educate is to grow, and one only grows in the haven of a community and a family... Do not be afraid to make teaching an act of love.” (*Letter to Teachers*, 2022)

You are not mere transmitters of content. You are shapers of destiny. You stand before your students as artisans of the future, called to form minds and inflame hearts with the desire for truth, goodness, and God.

VII. “LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME” (LUKE 18:16)

Our schools must echo the Lord’s invitation without hesitation or hindrance. Every classroom, every policy, and every adult must be a conduit of Christ’s tender welcome to the little ones.

The call to holiness is not for the few. It is the universal vocation of every baptised person. To love God’s children is to love the Truth. And the Truth is Christ Himself. St. Augustine rightly teaches:

“Nothing conquers except truth, and the victory of truth is love.”

To love children is to form them in truth, to protect them from falsehood, to uplift them in justice, and to accompany them toward holiness. It is to make visible the invisible presence of Christ through acts of kindness, integrity, mercy, and faith.

We must not underestimate the power of ordinary goodness: a kind word, a just decision, a listening heart. These are seeds of sanctity. This is the work of education as love.

VIII. FINAL EXHORTATION

Dear brothers and sisters, as we begin this new academic year, let us recommit ourselves, clergy and laypersons alike to the high calling of Catholic education. Let our schools be sanctuaries of encounter, laboratories of hope, and gardens of virtue. Let us love God's children by forming them in truth, serving them with compassion, and leading them to Christ.

IX. PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Mary, Mother of the Church,
accompany us in our educational mission.
Teach us to love with your tenderness,
to lead with your humility,
and to form with your wisdom.
May every child in our schools come to know Jesus,
love the Church,
and live the Gospel with joy.
Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.

Given at the Catholic Education Board of Management
on the **Eighteenth Day of August,**
in the **Year of Our Lord 2025,**
under the patronage of **Holy Mary, Seat of Wisdom,** pray for us.

Fr. David S. Khan
Episcopal Vicar for Education
CEO, Catholic Education Board of Management
Archdiocese of Port of Spain