

The relationship between parish and school has, historically, always been a very special one; it is characterised by mutual understanding, co-operation and a deep sense of solidarity. The Catholic school is, if you like, a seedbed from which the full flower of faith often grows.

Years ago the parish priest would be a frequent visitor to the school – and, laudably, some still are, despite the huge increase in administrative responsibilities that most parish priests face these days. I well remember as a boy at St Mary's school Hornchurch, seeing the church's first parish priest, Canon Jules van Meenen, making his way through the school in a cassock, with the aid of a walking stick. An impressive sight! It was at primary school that I learnt the *Missa de Angelis* and all the old Latin hymns for Benediction; I was also taught my catechism by a formidable nun called Sr Rita and was prepared for First Communion and, later in secondary school, for Confirmation.

Catechesis takes place in the parish now, which is perhaps no bad thing when one considers the already heavy workload of most teachers; but the catechetical link between school and parish remains, and it has become increasingly important with the growth of secularism and the 'new atheism' in our contemporary society.

The Catholic school, both staff and pupils, strives to live its ethos daily; the governors – especially but not exclusively foundation governors – have the responsibility of protecting and maintaining that ethos, so that the school can truly be said to be anchored in Christ within the Church. It is an ethos and a responsibility that requires strong, healthy and effective links with the parish.

It can never simply be a matter of schools holding their Christmas carol service in the church or gathering for an occasional parish Mass; the links between school and parish is not so much a set of pastoral obligations as a *relationship* – a relationship that reflects the bond between the members of the Body of Christ. This relationship will inevitably have its ups and downs, but the mutual commitment at its heart always remains its anchor and ground.