PASTORAL LETTER OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

FOR EDUCATION SUNDAY, 12/13 SEPTEMBER 2026

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

In today's Gospel, when speaking about forgiveness, Jesus tells Peter, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." This powerful teaching reminds us of the limitless and unconditional love of God. Through His mercy, we are offered forgiveness when we repent, and we are called in turn to be instruments of God's love, grace, forgiveness and peace.

Today, on Education Sunday, we celebrate the wonderful gift of Catholic education in our Archdiocese. In our Catholic schools, we strive to help young people grow in these virtues, forming communities where faith, compassion and reconciliation can flourish.

As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in the Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*: "Schools are not called to follow the pace of the digital world, but to offer that which the digital sphere by itself cannot provide, namely a shared time for learning and developing trustworthy relationships."

This call to relationship is reflected in our diocesan mission: "To form Christ-centred pilgrims of hope with kind hearts, questioning minds, a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for justice."

Today, I invite you to help bring this mission to life in Catholic education, so that our children, young people and school communities may continue to experience the joy and wonder of our faith.

I am most grateful for the wonderful response to last year's Education Sunday appeal when I asked parishioners to consider becoming Foundation Directors and Foundation Governors for our academies and schools. As a result of the appeal, we filled over 140 vacancies – a significant and humbling achievement.

Being a governor at a school or a director of a Catholic multi-academy trust board is a true vocation and a practical way to serve Christ and His Church. By giving your time, skills and faith, you can help shape the present and future of Catholic education for thousands of children and young people. It is a generous expression of Christian service and a practical witness to God's love.

Every day, in our 236 flourishing Catholic state schools and academies and 5 excellent Catholic independent schools, children and young people are invited to encounter Christ and to grow as pilgrims of hope. Through prayer, learning and service, our schools nurture both faith and excellence, helping each child to recognise their God-given dignity and potential. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to our school leaders, priest, deacon and lay chaplains, directors, governors, teachers and support staff whose commitment, generosity and witness make this mission possible.

Their faithful service supports not only the education of our young people but also the mission of the Church, and I am profoundly grateful for all that they do.

Many of our schools are part of Catholic multi-academy trusts, each led by a Board of Directors and supported by local and, in the case of our largest academy trusts, regional governing bodies serving individual schools and communities. Our voluntary-aided schools are supported by dedicated Boards of Governors, who also play a vital role in the life of the school. In every case, foundation directors and foundation governors, appointed by the Archdiocese on my behalf, help to ensure that the Catholic mission and identity of the school remain at its heart. I am deeply grateful for their generous service, leadership and vocation.

God's limitless love and merciful forgiveness offer us a powerful example. By volunteering as a director or governor, you would be responding to the Lord's call to share what you have received, allowing His mercy to shape your service and helping our schools to be places of compassion, forgiveness and hope.

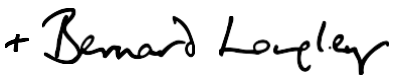
We welcome those with experience in Catholic life and mission, education, finance, law, HR, estates management, or any field that could strengthen our schools. You will receive full training and support to help you flourish in the role.

If you are a practising Catholic, demonstrated through regular Sunday Mass attendance, and your parish priest supports your application, I would ask you to consider this calling. Through your service, you can help our schools to flourish, ensuring they remain Christ-centred communities of learning, compassion, reconciliation and hope.

As we see in today's Gospel, forgiveness is rooted in acts of love. I therefore ask you prayerfully to consider whether the Lord may be calling you to offer your time, gifts and experience in loving service of the young people and staff in our schools. If you feel prompted to respond, please speak to your parish priest, who has also shared details of the application process in the parish newsletter. For information, directors and governors typically spend around 10 hours each month undertaking their duties.

May the Lord bless you for considering this opportunity and may the example of Christ inspire you to respond generously to this invitation.

Yours devotedly in Christ



✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on 3 September 2026 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on Education Sunday (12/13 September 2026)