

# Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Education Service

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Director, Education Service

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Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had an enjoyable and relaxing half-term break after a busy start to the new academic year. The clocks have gone back, the long days of Summer are behind us and the evenings are drawing in. As I write, we are approaching Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, which fall on Sunday November 10 and Monday November 11 this year. These two days give us the opportunity to reflect not only on the many millions who have fought for us over the years, but also what they fought for. We mark the wars that have scarred our past and the bravery of the men and women who fought them. November 11, 2019, also known as Armistice Day, will mark 101 years since the end of the First World War with a range of tributes and commemorations set to take place across the country.

The poppy's origins as a symbol of remembrance lie in the First World War poem *In Flanders Fields* by Canadian officer and army surgeon, John McCrae, first published in December 1915. Its opening lines refer to how the flowers grew from the graves of soldiers across Western Europe during the conflict. Poppies grow where soil has been disturbed – in this case, by war:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row*

In November 1918 an American woman called Moina Michael came across John McCrae's *In Flanders Fields*. Ms Michael was so moved that she made a personal pledge to "keep the faith". She felt compelled to make a note of this pledge and hastily scribbled down a response entitled "We Shall Keep the Faith" on the back of a used envelope. From that day she vowed to wear and distribute a red poppy of Flanders Fields as a sign of remembrance.

*Oh! You who sleep in Flanders Fields,  
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!  
We caught the torch you threw  
And holding high, we keep the Faith  
With all who died.*

The practice of wearing a poppy in remembrance quickly spread to the UK, where the first ever Poppy Day was held on 11 November 1921, the third anniversary of Armistice Day. It was adopted as a symbol by the newly formed Royal British Legion, a charity established to provide support for members and veterans of the British Armed Forces and their families.

Their first Poppy Appeal in 1921 raised £106,000, with the appeal growing from the manufacturing of poppies in a room above a shop in Bermondsey, South London in the 1920s, to a facility in Richmond where 50 ex-servicemen and women now work all year-round, producing tens of millions of the symbolic flowers to raise funds for those who survived but for whom the war is never going to be over.

Whilst as Catholics we pray continually for peace, war remains a reality far too many have come to know. Peace is not dependant on what is going on around us, but on what is going on within. True peace is not merely the absence of war or the fragile exhaustion that exists in the aftermath of conflict, when lives have been torn apart, relationships broken, infrastructure destroyed, and homes demolished. Rather, the God-given peace that our Creator desires for us is built on justice, where everything and everyone is in right relationship with each other and can reach their God-given potential.

Catholic schools are intended to enable children and young people to grow to their God-given potential. They exist to make God known and play a key part in the Church's mission in education, placing Christ and the teachings of the Church at the centre of people's lives. Catholic schools are instruments of the Church, reaching out to the children and young people of our communities with Christ's teachings about life, death, and resurrection. They pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that "all may attain their eternal destiny".

The attainment of eternal destiny leads back to my starting point, i.e. Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. As Catholics we hold firm to the belief that death is not the end. St Paul reminds us that 'In Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:22). Dedicated to the Holy Souls, the entire month of November falls during Ordinary Time, as represented by the liturgical colour green. This symbol of hope is the colour of the sprouting seed and reminds us of our hope of reaping the eternal harvest of heaven, especially the hope of a glorious resurrection. Jesus died and rose again, so we too can have life beyond the grave. We are known by a loving God who gave his Son so whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

May we and all those in our care live with that same resurrection hope.

As you prepare to mark this special month of remembrance with your school communities, I would like to thank you for all you do to promote the Gospel values of justice and peace and for making Catholic schools places of hope and faith in the resurrection.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marie".

Marie Ryan