



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

## Senedd Reception, Assembly of Wales

*Mt Rev George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff*

SENEDD, ASSEMBLY FOR WALES, TUESDAY, 7 MAY 2013

### **Words of welcome and introduction spoken by the Most Revd George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff, at the Reception hosted by the Catholic Church in Wales for members of the National Assembly for Wales at the Senedd on 7 May 2013.**

On behalf of my colleagues Bishop Thomas Burns of Menevia and Bishop Peter Brignall of Wrexham, and of the whole Catholic community here in Wales, I would like to thank the Deputy Presiding Officer of the Assembly, David Melding, for sponsoring this event. Thank you also to the many Assembly members and staff for joining us today. Public Service is at the heart of the life of a civilised society. It is good to have opportunities to celebrate and thank those people who commit themselves in such a wholehearted way to the Common Good.

I love the phrase which says "There are no such people as strangers. Only friends who have not yet met". And that has certainly been my experience since coming to Wales. The experience too of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Welsh Assembly. Everywhere you go in the principality you will find Catholic Dioceses and parishes reaching out into to the wider community in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations. More than thirty thousand Catholics go to church every Sunday. They are an enormous resource of care and compassion. That is just one reason why we have been able to give £20,000 over two years to set up and be part of the foundation of Cardiff Citizens UK. This commitment arises from what Pope John Paul II called "...the threefold cornerstones of dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity". One of the last letters written by Pope Benedict was called "Charity is at the heart of the Church". I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the whole world is watching to see how Pope Francis is going to put that into action. Especially after his challenging statement when he became Pope that ours should be a poor church committed to the poor.

I am delighted that some of the agencies of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Wales and England are here today. They show how priests and people work together for the Common Good of society at large – not just the Catholic Church. They base their work on the best kept secret of the Catholic Church – the Church's Social Teaching. Let me introduce to you some of them briefly:

The Catholic Education Service which serves our Catholic schools. There are over 30,000 pupils in Catholic schools in Wales. Not all of these are members of the Catholic Church but they enjoy the Catholic ethos and excellent educational opportunities we provide in partnership with our local authorities. Catholic schools are amongst the most socially diverse in the country – with statistics to prove it!

I want to introduce Catholic Social Action Network. This is the official arm of the Bishops' Conference which sustains a sort of federation of social action charities. It is known as CARITAS. Those charities work for the most vulnerable people in society, providing support for families and children in need, the elderly, the homeless, refugees, people with disabilities and prisoners.

We have representatives from the National Justice and Peace Network which relates to Justice and Peace Groups in our parishes. They address issues such as Third World debt, political asylum, and the environment. The Catholic Association of Racial Justice works with black and minority ethnic groups promoting racial harmony and social cohesion particularly in our diverse cities.

The Catholic Fund for Overseas Development is the first cousin to relief organisations such as OXFAM, Christian Aid etc. It encourages our people to look outwards and see that we belong to a global village. It works with almost five hundred partners at home and overseas in disaster emergencies, but equally important seeking to end poverty and injustice. Suffering is not denominational. CAFOD cares for people of all faiths and none. The Catholic people of the Cardiff diocese alone gave almost half a million pounds to the work of CAFOD last year.

Yesterday I went down to the docks at Barry to see what was occurring! It reminded me of the work of the Apostleship of Sea in Welsh docks at Cardiff, Milford Haven, Newport, Swansea and Port Talbot. This Catholic charity ensures the often foreign crews are visited in the very short turn-arounds in these docks, offering rest and recreation, a listening ear, telephone facilities and much more.

I see this gathering as a celebration of the partnership and goodwill which already exists between the Catholic Church and the Welsh Assembly.

**+ George Stack**

*Archbishop of Cardiff*