Staff of the Religious Education Centre have been busy on a number of fronts during 2012, supporting schools in the further development of Religious Education using the Diocesan RE curriculum ‘Awakenings.’ One special task undertaken this year was the revamping of an online curriculum planning tool to support the work of teachers in preparing classroom Religious Education. Another important element of this year’s work has been to work with leadership teams in schools to strengthen their Catholic school identity.

Finally, a seasonal thought; Thomas Groome, in ‘Will There Be Faith’ HarperOne (2011), recounts a - life to Faith to life - moment involving his nine year old son Teddy (page 300). Teddy tells his father he doesn’t believe in Santa Claus any more. In responding to Teddy, the wise Thomas Groome invokes the story of Virginia, reproduced below in full. May we take time, this Christmas season, to welcome the coming of the Christ-child into our lives. To transpose the text of the story, “He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.”

With every good wish for a happy and holy Christmas and New Year.

Liam G Davison
Director of Religious Education

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.

Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote a letter to the editor of New York's Sun, and the quick response was printed as an unsigned editorial Sept. 21, 1897. The work of veteran newsman Francis Pharcellus Church has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial, appearing in part or whole in dozens of languages in books, movies, and other editorials, and on posters and stamps.

Dear Editor: I am 8 years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.' Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus? (Virginia O'Hanlon, 115 West Ninety-Fifth St.)

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the scepticism of a sceptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared
with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

http://www.newseum.org/yesvirginia/