

## Conversations

Last week a group of 6<sup>th</sup> years came to me about fundraising for caps and gowns for their graduation. To help make the decision I reverted to the principle: “Who is benefiting from the fundraising? If it is for a charitable organisation or for the whole school – Yes. If it is for an individual student or a small group of students – No. So in this situation I said no. And indeed the 6<sup>th</sup> years were not very happy, even after extensive discussion with them about coming up with a better principle.

We are all the time making decisions. But on what basis are we making decisions? What principles are we using? What is the criteria we are using to make our decisions? Or are we just making decisions on a random basis with no reason?

On the Friday week May 25th, this country is voting on a Referendum. Voters will be asked to make a decision.

All voters will be asked to vote on a proposal to change the Constitution of Ireland. The proposed change to the Constitution is from:

40.3.3 The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.

To

40.3.3. Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancy”

This is an emotive topic with strong view held by both people who support a change and by people who are against a change. However as witnessed on the Claire Byrne programme last Monday, the debate is characterised by fixed viewpoints, emotional arguments, shouting and poor listening.

However moral questions such as raised by this constitution have serious consequences whatever way the vote goes.

The real challenge is how to engage in conversations about topics such as this.

To this end, we invite you, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> students to a conversation. This is a conversation which you will voluntary enter and which will be facilitated by a neutral chair-person.

However there are certain rules.

As Jordan Peterson puts in a “conversation”:

- Allow all participants to express and organise their thoughts
- Everyone participating is trying to solve a problem, instead of validating their own positions
- Act on the premise that all have something to learn
- Decide that the unknown makes a better friend than the known.
- The only desire is for Truth itself

- Assume the person you listening to might know something you do not

These rules are very similar to principles of Socratic Dialectic

- The aim is to uncover the truth, not to win an argument. This is a joint endeavour.
- Delight in being proved wrong.
- Really understand the viewpoint of another.
- Question all assumptions rather than proceeding from those assumptions.
- In the discovery of truth good questions are more powerful than lengthy speeches.

If this is sometime that interests you, reflect on this today and tomorrow we will take your names. Next week we will hold our first CONVERSATION, of which we hope there will be many.

And so the challenge for this week is to ask yourself the question:

How do we have real conversations?