

**Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
75th Annual General Meeting & Conference
Deerhurst Resort, Huntsville**

President's Address

Paul C. Whitehead

Saturday, April 30, 2005

INTRODUCTION

- Welcome to OCSTA's 75th Annual General Meeting.
- April 24, 1930, was the date of our Association's first Annual General Meeting. Trustees answered the call from the clergy to assume the mantle of leadership in the promotion and protection of Catholic education. Our beginnings were modest and our challenges were great, yet here we are in 2005, celebrating our Association's 75th Anniversary. The very existence of our Catholic school system is a testament to the commitment, focus, vision and faith of those Catholic trustees who came before us. Our system today is strong because of their achievements and your commitment and faith. It gives me great

pleasure to address you today, on this momentous occasion.

- Our Annual General Meeting is one of the few times during the year when members of OCSTA's leadership team have an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with trustees from across the province. I hope that, by the time you leave this beautiful resort, you will have a renewed perspective on Catholic education, the role of your Association and your calling as a Catholic school trustee.

- During my presentation, I will discuss key activities that the Association has undertaken over the past year and then will speak to our role as trustees and as board members of this Association, both within the context of OCSTA's history, and what I perceive to be the future.

- Before doing that, however, there are several people that I wish to acknowledge, some of the people who make Catholic education work, the people who make this association work and some who are making this conference a success.

Acknowledgements

1. Board leadership teams (Chairs, Vice Chairs, Directors of Education, Senior Staff)
2. OCSTA Board of Directors

Bernard Murray, Vice-President	- Huron-Perth
Louise Ervin, Past President	- Waterloo
Ken Adamson	- Dufferin-Peel
Oliver Carroll	- Toronto
Elizabeth Crowe	- York
Peter DelGuidice	- Northeastern
William Goetz	- Bruce-Grey
Brenda Kormendy	- St. Clair
A.J.M. (Art) Lamarche	- Ottawa-Carleton
Catherine LeBlanc-Miller	- Toronto
Alice Anne LeMay	- Halton
Paula Peroni	- Sudbury
Gerry Rousseau	- Northwest
Bob Schreader	- Renfrew County
Dan Whipple	- Niagara
Suzanne Youngs	- Parry Sound
RCSSB	
Bishop John Boissonneau, OCCB Liaison	

Fr. Pat Fitzpatrick, Chaplain

3. Hosts - Simcoe Muskoka CDSB

4. OCSTA Staff

Support Staff: Connie, Jane, Pam, Phil

Office Administrator: Margaret Binns

Accountant: June Johnson

Co-ordinator of Labour Relations: Mike Riley

Co-ordinator of Communication: Sharon McMillan

Director of Catholic Education: Bob Anderson

Director of Legislative & Political Affairs: Carol Devine

Executive Director: John Stunt

Section One: Major Accomplishments, 2004-05

Political Advocacy

- The success of our advocacy efforts is closely linked to the strength of our relationships with political leaders and the effectiveness of the information that we present to the government through face-to-face to

meetings, briefs, formal presentations and letters.

- We maintain regular communications with the Minister, his staff, and other political leaders in the government.

- In addition to our ongoing meetings with the Minister over the past year, we have also met with
 - The Minister's Parliamentary Assistants, MPPs Kathleen Wynne and David Orazietti,
 - Opposition leader, John Tory, and
 - Tory Education Critic, Frank Klees

- We have provided a number of timely submissions to government committees:
 - **The Pre Budget Consultation of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs** OCSTA's submission reflected key concerns raised in the Association's November 2004 Finance Brief. Our recommendations to the government highlighted the concerns of Catholic school boards in regard to the equity and adequacy of some allocations within the current funding formula.

- **The Minister of Culture and The Standing Committee on Justice Policy** In December, OCSTA, together with the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, put forward a submission that voiced concerns with regard to Bill 60, *The Ontario Heritage Amendment Act* and its potentially costly impact on property owners such as school boards. Our concerns had some impact as the passing of Bill 60 was delayed for months while the government consulted further with interested parties. Bill 60 was eventually passed on April 19. It is our understanding that a consultation group will soon be convened to provide advice regarding the criteria for designating heritage buildings, and to comment on the factors to be considered by municipalities and the OMB in dealing with requests for demolition. OCSTA will take steps to ensure that the concerns of Catholic school boards are introduced into the discussion.

Partnership Table

- Over the past year, the Minister of Education has held a number of meetings of the Education Partnership Table.
- OCSTA sits at this table and has attended all meetings

- Discussions, so far, have centred around Ministry “Mini Papers” that addressed the following topics:
 - Creating an Education Partnership Table
 - Teacher Excellence and Professional Development
 - Student Achievement
 - Revitalizing the Ontario College of Teachers

- The most recent meeting was held on April 7 and focused on: education funding 2005/06; the final phase of Dr. Alan King’s Report; the role of principals; and a discussion paper on the “Parent Voice in Education” project. The Minister will be holding regional meetings to gather responses to this working paper.

- OCSTA continues to be represented at the ICE partnership table and on all of the ICE committees and work groups. In addition, we participate in a wide variety of curriculum related activities from the EQAO Advisory Group to the Ministry Committee and college of teachers consultations. In each of these venues OCSTA represents the interest of Catholic school boards in ensuring that new projects and initiatives recognize the distinctive nature of Catholic education.

Education Finance

- One of the key activities in which OCSTA engages, on behalf of Catholic school boards, is constant involvement in the Ministry’s

decision-making process regarding education financing, at both the political and staff levels.

- Each year, prior to the time of the provincial budget and the release of legislative grants, OCSTA prepares and submits a brief on the specific needs of Catholic boards. Its content is informed by advice received from our member boards, in the form of AGM resolutions, advice from our Working Group on Funding and the ongoing work of our Legislation and Finance Committee and senior OCSTA staff.
- OCSTA participates in the Provincial Budget announcement, analyzes content, provides boards with information and comments publicly, if appropriate. Issues of concern are brought directly to the government.
- On an ongoing basis, OCSTA has representation on Ministry of Education committees reviewing various aspects of education funding.
- At all times, OCSTA keeps a close watch on grant announcements as they are made, and raises questions and concerns as necessary with the Ministry and the government.
- OCSTA appreciates the on-going assistance of our Working Group on Funding. Working Group members include: Patrick Daly (Hamilton-

Wentworth CDSB), Wally Easton (OCSBOA), Hugh Lee (Sudbury CDSB), Pete Derochie (Simcoe Muskoka CDSB), Gerry Thuss (OCSSOA), Dave Visser (OCSBOA), Grant Andrews and Tom Kelly who have served as consultants, OCSTA Vice President, Bernard Murray, OCSTA members of staff Carol Devine and John Stunt. It has been a pleasure to work with this very talented group of people.

- An update on some of the most significant financial issues in which OCSTA has been involved includes the following:

Special Education Funding

- OCSTA strongly advocated for timely return of funds that were clawed-back from boards. We recommended criteria for distribution that were supported by our member boards. Some of our recommendations were reflected in the March 31 announcement.
- It is OCSTA's intention to participate fully in discussions of provincial Working Group on Special Education. Its work is expected to begin in the very near future.
- OCSTA formed a Working Group made up of specialists in Special Education and Finance Supervisory Officers. It has been meeting and

reviewing reports prepared by OCSOA and OPSBA regarding special education funding.

- OCSTA will continue discussions with these board personnel in order to develop recommendations for future action.

Transportation Grant

- Since the release of the student transportation discussion paper in May, 2004, OCSTA, with the assistance of senior business and transportation officials from English Catholic and French Catholic boards, has conducted an extensive analysis of the proposed formula, in an effort to understand the reason for the negative impact of the proposals on so many Catholic boards, and to suggest improvements.
- OCSTA has been in on-going communication with Ministry officials, the Minister's political staff and the Minister himself on these issues.
- In the face of changing Ministry proposals (first the so called "discussion paper," then Scenario G), OCSTA has consistently advocated for

- i. An equitable formula that treats school boards and students in similar circumstances in a similar manner;
 - ii. A needs-based formula, that is a formula that allocates funding for students who require transportation; and
 - iii. Standardized benchmarks against which levels of service can be measured.
- Our current recommendation is for a moratorium on decreases in transportation funding for individual boards for at least another year, in order for further analysis may take place.
 - Our position is also that anticipated increases to boards that have experienced deficits in transportation funding for many years should proceed.
 - Indications are that the Minister may continue to seek a satisfactory model and that, in the meantime, the status quo or something close to it may remain.

Copyright

- Existing licenses expired 31 August 2004.

- Negotiations for a new license failed.
- Access Copyright filed for a tariff of \$12.00/FTE student with the Copyright Board. Boards now pay under \$3.40/FTE.
- The Pan Canadian Consortium that represents Ministries of Education and publicly funded school boards in Canada (except Quebec) filed an objection.
- The matter is in the hands of the Copyright Board, which will begin hearing the case in January 2007. The Copyright Board will hand down its decision and set a tariff that will likely apply retroactively, as of 1 January 2005. In the meantime, extensive documentation is being prepared and filed by both parties.
- Agreement was reached to have licenses that expired 31 August 2004, extended until the Copyright Board sets a tariff.
- Currently, a study to determine the volume and types of material being photocopied is underway in a large sample of schools across Canada.

Collective Bargaining

- No financial issues are of greater importance to school boards than those related to collective bargaining.
- OCSTA has consistently put forward to the government, at every opportunity that we get, the need for provincial funding for employee salaries and benefits that is more closely aligned to the actual expenditures of school boards.
- During the past five months, a unique development in collective bargaining has occurred. What started as an expression of the Minister's desire to consult with teacher unions and provincial trustee association, in order to arrive at a provincial policy position on elementary planning and preparation time and secondary workload issues in order that he might arrive provincial policies of funding, have taken the form of active tri-partite negotiations involving teacher federations, school board associations and the Minister.
- On April 16 OCSTA reported in detail to Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Directors and senior finance and human resources staff in regard to these provincial discussions.

- We trust that information has been shared with you. This topic will be dealt with again in the afternoon session under the topic of current issues.
- At that meeting of April 16, OCSTA received a strong mandate from our boards to engage in discussions with the Minister and OECTA. Key issues in these discussions for Catholic Boards will be parity and equity, matters that were not on the table in the ETFO discussions.
- We have formed an OCSTA Task Force on Bargaining and an OCSTA Negotiations Committee. Members of these teams represent all areas of the province and all types of boards. They include Trustees, Directors of Education, Senior Business Officials, Human Resources specialists and OCSTA staff. The Committee held its first meeting this past Tuesday in order to prepare for the initial meeting, now scheduled for May 2.
- 11 agreements are now in place, 9 of these are two-year agreements. A framework agreement would require that the two-year agreements be reopened in order to achieve four-year agreements.

Separate School Assessment

- Those present at last year's OCSTA/OCSSOA Finance Seminar will recall an extensive presentation regarding the work being done by Catholic school boards and by OCSTA to help ensure a full and

accurate assessment roll and voters' list, both of which constitute the public record of the level of support for Catholic schools in Ontario.

- Since that time, OCSTA's work has continued.
- A comprehensive paper explaining the source of problems with the assessment base and recommending legislative and regulatory solutions was produced, for the Association, by Peter Lauwers.
- Brad Nixon, a solicitor specializing in assessment issues was retained by OCSTA to assist us in achieving those changes. Our focus has been primarily on those changes that might be achieved administratively or through regulatory means rather than through legislation because the latter are more difficult to achieve for a variety of political and practical reasons.
- A series of meetings has been held and continue to occur with officials from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and the Municipal Property and Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to explain and advocate for the changes we are seeking. Further staff level meetings, as well as political meetings are also planned, including one with David Zimmer, Parliamentary Assistant to the Attorney General, in early May.

- In addition, through the generosity of a number of our boards, OCSTA has provided an extensive package of materials used by boards to assist in local efforts to educate Catholic ratepayers about the importance of registration as separate school supporters.
- It is our hope that all of our efforts will bear fruit in the near future.
- Boards are reminded that the population of electoral groups as of January 1, 2006 will be used to determine trustee numbers for the November, 2006 election.

Information and Services

- The Association has historically been a resource for trustees and senior board staff interested in opportunities for professional development and faith formation that are targeted to the particular needs of the Catholic school board leadership team.
- Our annual seminars and events are designed to provide an opportunity for
 - timely and effective dialogue with peers and OCSTA's leadership team,
 - updates on critical issues,

- best practices in school board leadership/management, and
 - faith development.

- For those of you who have not attended our annual Regional Meetings, I encourage you to attend next fall. These meetings are held in your communities and regions in order to facilitate attendance and to provide trustees with an opportunity to discuss the local impact of provincial initiatives with regional colleagues and Association leaders.

- This year we tried something a little different by hosting an extended, facilitated discussion of critical issues. Our evaluations indicate this was helpful and participants appreciated hearing the perspectives of others in their region on various timely and important issues.

- The faith formation element was equally engaging. This year we were pleased to introduce you to Jim Fogarty, a retired secondary school chaplain and religious education consultant. As many of you recall, Jim addressed the topic “From Butler to Baltimore & Beyond.” His presentation provided an engaging examination of the ways in which we pass on the Catholic tradition to our children. We discussed the changes made to catechetical resources over the years and the social factors that affect that process.

- In addition to the Regional Meetings we also hosted the Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Directors of Education Seminar in January and the annual Labour Relations Seminar in February.
- These seminars provided opportunity for effective two-way dialogue on a number of issues including labour relations, transportation funding and special education. We also offered presentations by experts on topics ranging from Supervisory Time and Workload Issues to Communication Strategies for Effective Leadership.

Communications and Public Relations

- Our efforts in the area of advocacy are supported by a consistent and effective strategy of communications. As part of our mission to promote Catholic education, we recently developed a number of new communication vehicles designed to raise the profile of Catholic education and to increase province-wide support for Catholic education.
- At the beginning of the year, we launched our revamped website. Visitors to our home page are now greeted with a brief multi-media presentation that portrays Catholic education through words, images and sounds. We extend our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board who kindly allowed us to highlight their students and teachers on our website.

- To reach other audiences, we developed a new poster entitled “Catholic Schools – Nurturing the Spirit of Faith and Learning.” Many of you have seen this poster. A large, version of it is on display in the lobby.
- The poster is designed to appeal to Catholic parents, those preparing for parenthood, grandparents and others who may have influence in the registration or enrolment of children in Catholic schools. We look forward to releasing additional posters, using the same design concept and theme, and featuring other students to reflect the rich diversity in our communities.
- To complement the poster we have developed a brochure about Catholic Education. Copies of this brochure are included in your Conference kits. You will note that the imagery used in the brochure reflects that seen on the poster and on the OCSTA website. The words touch on the tradition and essence of Catholic education in Ontario and also articulate a clear call to action to Catholic ratepayers and tenants to ensure that they are designated as Catholic school supporters on their municipal records.

It is our hope that this brochure will inform and engage parents, students, parishioners, government partners, the media and the wider community.

- Beginning this Sunday, May 1, Catholic school boards across the province will launch promotions for “Catholic Education Week.” We, of course, celebrate the richness of our Catholic education system everyday, but this coordinated promotion allows us to focus on and truly appreciate the distinctiveness of our Catholic education system. We are blessed to have volunteers from our boards whose vision, creativity and energy help to develop the resources used by boards to celebrate this event.

- As many of you know, each year the Catholic Register produces a Catholic Education Week supplement. OCSTA contributes some editorial work to that supplement. We encourage all of you to visit our registration area to pick up one of the free copies provided to us, courtesy of the Catholic Register.

- Throughout the year the Association has prepared a number of advertisements designed to raise the profile of Catholic education. Last fall we prepared and ran an ad that contained the 2003 campaign theme “Catholic Education: A Reason to Celebrate, A Tradition to Support. We shared this artwork with all of our school boards and I understand that many boards placed these ads in their local media. The current

“Catholic Schools” campaign has also been formatted as an advertisement and placed in various education supplements.

STRETCH BREAK (ONE MINUTE)

Section Two - A Personal Reflection of the Last 75 Years

I would like to focus briefly on the rich history of OCSTA over these past few years and from that history speak about what that experience has taught us as an organization of Catholic school boards.

Because so few of us were active Trustees 75 years ago, it is useful that we have Michael Power’s political history of Catholic separate schools in Ontario to tell us older parts our story. *A Promise Fulfilled* provides us with a perspective of many who tilled the soil of Catholic education long before many of us became involved. The fact that we are celebrating this 75th anniversary and in the preparation of this address has caused me to ponder those who came before as well as those who are our contemporaries whom we admire and who have shaped us and from whom we learn. Any such list cannot help but be incomplete and idiosyncratic. No one person’s list is better than another’s, no matter how much they differ.

To name some, is to miss many. To name none, is to ignore all debts. I will name only six, though my heart and mind record my debts to many others and the tally continues to grow. My list of six may surprise you, but it is my list not yours. Perhaps you will consider making your own.

Chronologically, my list starts with Martin Quinn, perhaps the most tragic figure in our history of fighting for fairness in funding. For me, Martin Quinn is something of a hero, not because he succeeded or was free of faults, but because he tried. Michael Power provide the flavour of this man: “The Meteoric rise and fall of the Catholic Taxpayers Association in the 1930s, forms one of the strangest chapters in the history of separate school politics in the Province of Ontario. The CTA’s principal raison d’etre was to convince the provincial government, regardless of the party in power, to enact amendments to the Assessment Act that would guarantee a transparent and equitable distribution of corporation and utility taxes, according to the number of students enrolled in the two public school systems. It was as simple as that. The leading player from the CTA was Martin Quinn, a successful Toronto businessman turned pamphleteer and amateur politician.”

In his pursuit of financing equity Quinn had little patience for the clerics of his day, whom he perceived as moving too slowly. His battles with the Bishops were as vigorous as with the politicians. He challenged them with

the same enthusiasm for the cause as he took on the businessmen of the day who would not pay separate school taxes and the Loyal Orange Lodge that opposed him and his goals. At various times he sensed the success of his crusade for fundamental fairness to be close at hand, but it was not to be. Martin Quinn became marginalized in the movement for separate schools and in the CTA itself.

Michael Power writes: “Martin J. Quinn, who had carried the Catholic Taxpayer’s Association on his own shoulders from 1931 to 1937, spent the rest of his life writing letters and pamphlets justifying himself and attacking the bishops, politicians and all those he called turncoat Catholics.

The Catholic Taxpayers Association was a noble experiment, and Quinn ended up the sacrificial lamb on the high altar of provincial and local church politics. Brilliant, aggressive and decisive, he could not accept the fact that he had been beaten in the game of high stakes politics at Queen’s Park and the Archbishop’s palace.

In another place Power writes, “... Quinn’s fate was to fall from grace and to be condemned to an undeserved obscurity. The Catholic community soon forgot him.”

This Catholic school community remembers him today because he tried, he really tried. But, from his difficulties, we learn the lessons of partnership, patience and process.

Quinn died in 1949. Of course, I never met him. The second person that I deeply admire and consider to be a role model is a person that I met only briefly and only once. I know of him through his deeds and the words of others. He is a former President of this association, but it was not his presidency, in the mid 60s that was so special. It was his extended period of excellent work, in the area of education finance, that he performed as a Trustee and as a Director of this Association. Only a small number of Trustees have truly understood the intricacies and politics of education finance to the extent that they could exercise real and effective leadership in lobbying for change at both a political level, which many have done, but also at a ministry staff level, which fewer have been able to do. Dr. Joe Fyfe, a Sudbury physician and trustee was what Powers called OCSTA's "resident financial expert for more than twenty years" ... [a person who] often dealt one-on-one with the Minister of education."

My third hero is a person from whom I learned about Dr. Fyfe. He also taught me the inside story of the struggle for equity in educational finance and he impressed on me the importance of patience and waiting for the best moments to leverage political advantage. Father Raymond Desrocher

was an Oblate priest who worked at what was then OSSTA. He crafted finance brief and discerned policy positions that furthered the cause of our Association. I often came early for meetings so that I could sit with him and talk. He shared drafts of his manuscripts with me. He would patiently and with quiet enthusiasm explain the use of certain phrases and why it was important to craft our case in a particular manner in order that it could be more easily received by those we wanted to influence. I believe that it was he who saw most clearly and in a principled way why our Association should politically support the aspirations of French parents and organizations for French first language education in Ontario. Fr. Ray passed before the goal of equity was really achieved. His gift was to show a path of thought and action that avoids the frustrations of Martin Quinn.

The first three are no longer with us, the others are still among the quick. John Schrader and Joe Kraemer, with whom I had the pleasure of serving on what was then the London and Middlesex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board, were at that time public school teachers with co-terminus boards, and exemplary Catholic Trustees. They gave me ample opportunity to learn from their words and deeds what it takes to be a good trustee. My shortcomings are from lessons inadequately learned, not from lessons inadequately taught. By the way, they are both previous recipients of OCSTA Awards of Merit for Trustees.

I have admired Pat Daly for some time. He exemplifies in character and action what Catholic trusteeship should be about. His stewardship saw our association through difficult, perilous and controversial times. Throughout, he never lost sight of our mission and he never dispirited or lost his moral centre. When it comes to education finance he has been the modern Joe Fyfe.

Pat is Mr. Catholic Education in Hamilton-Wentworth and he continues to be an active participant in Catholic education on the Provincial scene. At times Pat and I disagree, but I have always learned from our exchanges and I consider his opinion to be extremely valuable. He never offers it for self-serving reasons, but always in the spirit of advancing our common cause. Catholic education benefits every day from the work and example of Pat Daly.

These people are part of our story and for me personal touchstones. One of the nice things about the people we admire is that we do not have to be like them in order to look up to them. We can learn from them without fretting about our own inadequacies. As I said previously, I have named only six, though my heart and mind record my debts to many others and the tally continues to grow.

None of the people I identified is a Bishop, but Bishops have played an enormous role in the development and political history of Catholic education in Ontario. Their ties to and support for this Association have been an important part of our history. Two anecdotes may interest you. We were founded in 1930, but getting Catholic Trustees to join was not easy. In late 1931 the Bishops endorsed the Association and issued an instruction that said “make it clear to Separate school trustees that they are in duty bound to become members of the Ontario Separate School Trustees’ Association, and to take an active interest in their work.” It still took years for the Association to sign up a majority of the Separate school boards.

In 1952 only 67 out of 300 separate school boards were members of OSSTA.

In 1954, 74 boards were members.

In 1958 there were 235 member boards.

At the 1957 AGM, Bishop Ryan of Hamilton made the initial suggestion that OSSTA hire a full-time employee. It was not until 1961 that Robert Laidlaw was hired as OSSTA’s first Executive Director.

The Bishops exercised leadership and did so early. The followership of Trustees took somewhat longer.

Section 3 – What We Have Learned

What have we learned as an Association over these past seventy-five years that continues to influence what we do today? I think the following statements concisely sum up the collective wisdom OCSTA has garnered over the years.

- We have learned that Catholic trustees and the Association that represents them must be inspired by the gospel and deeply rooted in faith. Our history shows us that Catholic trustees as advocates, guardians and stewards of Catholic education must first and foremost ensure that the mission of Catholic education as part of the broader mission of the church is fulfilled.
- We have learned that for the most part change has been incremental. The struggle for the completion of our system and its full and equitable funding took place over a long period of time.
- We have learned to be persistent
- We have learned the importance of having a clearly defined goal focus – a shared vision and mission developed in consultation with our community.

- We have learned the importance of working in partnerships with others in the Catholic and broader community in achieving our vision and mission.
- We have learned the importance of unity in our community and the importance of a strong and unified provincial voice for speaking on behalf of our member boards in achieving our goals.
- We have learned the importance of intellectual rigour and honesty in developing responses to the critical issues of the day.
- We have learned the importance of being thoroughly prepared in the development of written briefs and submissions to government and in meetings with politicians.
- We have learned the importance of good communications both internally and externally to our Association
- We have learned to work with governments of all stripes and to leverage our political advantage in ways that are supportive and constructive for the government of the day; yet firm and unequivocal on matters with which we take issue.
- We have learned that we must always be vigilant as there are always those who would prefer that Catholic schools don't exist and actively work towards that goal.

- We have learned to rely on and to utilize the collective wisdom and leadership of our membership and the staff we employ in our boards and in your provincial association.
- We have learned that we can never be complacent or rest on our achievements – there is much yet to do in the struggle to promote and protect Catholic education.

Section 4 – Opportunities & Challenges

As we move to the future, we have some opportunities and some challenges ahead of us for which the wisdom gained over the past seventy-five years can be applied.

Opportunities

When it comes to material things Catholic schools in Ontario are in the best situation ever. The dollars available to educate Catholic children, the buildings in which to do it and the quality of programs and materials go beyond the dreams of the most optimistic of Catholic Trustees as recently as twenty years ago, let alone in the 1950s or earlier.

Our complaints about adequacy are grounded in what we would like to have and what we would like to do. Those complaints are not about our now having less than previously.

Our staff at every level is more highly trained and educated than ever before.

We are still the system of choice for over a million parents in Ontario and there are no signs of the support for our system declining.

Challenges

Our short-term and long-term challenges are not material or enrolment driven. They are brought about by cultural and social changes that have a dramatic effect on the religious and spiritual character of our system. The reason for our existence is to make it possible for Catholic parents to choose to have their children receive a religious and spiritual formation in an educational environment. The fundamental *raison d'être* for Catholic schools has not changed. What has changed is the social, cultural and globalized environment in which we live.

We live in a society that is increasingly secular. The forces of secularization are probably stronger today than they ever have been. Our

popular culture and its modes of transmission constitute a set of pressures that border on the irresistible, unless you are a recluse. Schools are instruments for the transmission of culture and religion is a part of our culture. Those lessons that stick, however, are those that are more widely valued and reinforced in other parts of family and daily life.

We recognize the present reality that our schools have many “un-churched” kids and that for most students the school is the centre of the religious life that they experience.

Do we think that Catholic schools are going to reverse this process; or do our schools only slow the rate of erosion from what it would be if they did not exist?

We need not look far to appreciate how quickly the forces of secularization can work. The province of Quebec went from being the most religious province in Canada to become the clearly the most secular province. It did so in less than two generations, fewer than forty years.

I believe that we allow parents to think that our schools can do for their children what it took the family, the parish and the school, working in partnership, to do for them a generation ago. The beneficiaries of the home, church and school partnership are the increasingly secularized parents of today.

On the evidence, secularism breeds increased secularism. That it might spawn an inclination toward the sacred and a rekindling of religious fervour can be hoped for, but may not have the best odds. The life and suffering of Pope John Paul was found to be moving for many, but how did it change our families, our schools or our society? Will any of the recent events, including the election of Pope Benedict slow the rate of divorce among Catholics, increase fervour, or slow the pace of secularism? These are sociological questions, not Catholic Trustees questions. The question for us is what are we going to do, not about the pace of the world, but to keep Catholic schools alive, well and available to Catholic parents who are prepared to entrust their children to them, no matter what their motives or personal circumstances?

The social milieu is not all that congenial right now, but we are a people of hope and we have educational resources that would be the envy of Catholics in just about every other part of the world. Our task as Trustees is to maximize their use in the service of the Catholic community. I know full well that you are already doing that and that you will continue even when there are discouraging signs and when others seem unappreciative of your efforts.

The job of OCSTA is to promote and protect Catholic education provincially, in order that you can do your excellent work locally. You

have created this organization in your image because you, the membership, are OCSTA. OCSTA been here for Catholic education in the past, we are here now and we will continue to be here in the future. We do it because it is the will of Catholic Trustees to respond to the highest aspirations of parents for their children and to assist in their preparation for an adulthood of active participation in our faith community.

Each of us as a Catholic Trustees has answered the call for service and we know that it is not a call for individualized effort. It is a call to work as a community, as a member of Board of Trustees, for the pursuit of common goals in the service of our God and all of God's children who attend our schools.

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