

# Our Catholic Schools 2006-07

A Discussion on  
Ontario's Catholic Schools  
And their Future

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Resource Material

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Institute of Catholic Education

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# The Development of Catholic Schools in Ontario

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The creation of a state-supported, universally accessible, and comprehensive Catholic education system in Ontario was never anticipated by the first pioneers in what was then called Upper Canada. In the 1830s, Catholic education—for that matter any education—was considered to be within the realm of the few: young men training for the church, public service, or the professions. Bishop Alexander Macdonell of Kingston secured some financial support from the crown for schoolmasters, some of whom were his priests. Small groups of children undertook a classical and catechetical education in their parish rectory, a local home, or in log school houses often shared between Catholics and their non-Catholic neighbours.

In 1841, Macdonell's dream of more permanent funding for Catholic schools by the state was partially realized, when the new school Act for the United Province of Canada (a union of Upper and Lower Canada, today's Ontario and Quebec) included a clause that permitted Catholics and others to establish denominational schools. The growth of Catholic schools over the next twenty-five years was punctuated by sectarian violence, linguistic conflict, and political manoeuvring within the poorly conceived and constitutionally flawed legislature of Canada. These schools also emerged at a time in the 1840s and 1850s when Egerton Ryerson, the School Superintendent of Canada West, pushed for free, universal, and an academically progressive public school system in what had been Upper Canada (now Ontario). He believed such schools would promote loyalty to the Crown, solid citizenship, a sound curriculum, and a generic Christianity.

The latter point was troubling to many Catholics, who believed that the non-sectarian Christianity promoted in public schools, and fostered by the large numbers of Protestant schoolmasters, amounted to little more than

Protestant proselytization. Bishop Armand de Charbonnel of Toronto (1850-1860) went so far as to call public schools an "insult" to the Catholic population and he urged his flock to establish and support distinctively Catholic schools. All of this squabbling over education came at a time of troubled relations between Catholics and Protestants in Canada. Although caused, in part, by sectarian bitterness imported from Europe, Upper Canadian Christians created their own reasons to prey upon one another; the arrival of thousands of Irish Catholic refugees from the potato famine was regarded as a scourge upon the land, while French Canadian Catholic legislators were accused of furthering the interests of Catholicism by means of their strong presence in the Canadian Assembly. In the 1850s, expressions of sectarian bitterness varied from hateful rhetorical exchanges between Protestants and Catholics in the public press, to full-fledged riots in the towns and cities of what is now Ontario.

The extension of Catholic schools in Upper Canada was often at the heart of the bitterness and bloodshed. In 1855, by the weight of French Canadian Catholic votes, the Assembly passed the Tache Act, which extended the rights of Upper Canada's Catholic minority to create and manage their own schools. Similarly in 1863, the votes of French Canadian Catholic legislators and their moderate Anglophone allies passed the Scott Act, which confirmed, among other things, Catholic school trustees with all of the rights and privileges of their counterparts in the public schools, and allowed Catholic schools a share of the Common School Fund provided by the Canadian government. What infuriated English-speaking Protestants in Upper Canada was that they did not want these schools in their section of Canada but were forced to accept them because of the preponderance of French-Canadian Catholic legislators (from the Lower Canadian section of the Assembly) who

were determined to secure educational rights for their Catholic brothers and sisters, who were a minority in Upper Canada.

The sectionalism that helped to create Catholic schools also prompted Upper Canadian Protestants to demand the end to the farcical union between Upper and Lower Canada. In 1867, the British North America Act created Canada, with both federal and provincial governments, the latter of which were solely responsible for education. Catholics in the new province of Ontario, now faced a hostile Protestant majority, without the security of their old French Canadian allies from the new province of Quebec. In advance of Confederation, with their fragile minority rights to Catholic schools in mind, Archbishop John Joseph Lynch of Toronto (1860-88) and politician Thomas D'Arcy McGee initiated a process to secure the rights of Catholic schools. Under section 93 of the BNA Act, all the educational rights held by religious minorities at the time of Confederation would be secured constitutionally thereafter. For Catholics in Ontario this meant the right to establish, manage and control their own schools, and to share proportionally in the government funds allotted to education. In time, this section 93 would become the touchstone for most constitutional and legal debates regarding Ontario's Catholic schools.

Ryerson never thought denominational schools would survive. In the late nineteenth century, Catholic schools were chronically under funded because of their small tax base, their inability to share in the business tax assessment, and their securing of only a tiny share of government school funds. Moreover, after Confederation, Ontario grew rapidly and emerged as Canada's industrial and urban heartland. The population increased dramatically and new strains were placed on the education system. Ontarians demanded progressive, high quality education commensurate with the commercial and industrial advances of their society. Catholic schools survived the stresses of the new Ontario because of the dogged dedication of Catholic leaders to fight for legislative changes favouring their schools and, because of the generosity of

Catholic religious orders who dominated the teaching ranks in these schools, adapted to the new curricular changes, and donated much of their salary back into the schools. Women religious were notable in their ability to attain provincial teaching certification, despite the popular belief (particularly among Catholics themselves) that "nuns" would never expose themselves to the dangers of "Protestant" teacher's colleges (Normal Schools).

In no case was the self-sacrifice of Catholic school supporters more evident than in the case of high schools. Created by an act of the Ontario legislature in 1871, Ontario's high schools would emerge as one way in which young Ontarians could be moulded to meet the demands of their burgeoning urban industrial society. Because they had not existed as such at the time of Confederation, Catholic high schools were not eligible for Provincial grants. Before Confederation, however, some Catholic schools offered instruction to older students under the auspices of the common school. Later, several Catholic schools offered fifth book classes (closely resembling grades 9 and 10) and were in a legal position to do so after 1899, when the government broadened its regulations regarding schools that offered a "continuation" of the curriculum beyond what is now grade eight. In reality, however, Catholics could only direct their taxes to public high schools and, if they so desired, could pay tuition fees to have their children receive a full high school education in "private" Catholic schools, usually run by religious orders. After decades of Catholic lobbying and sectarian fighting on this injustice, the Catholic bishops and the Ontario Government agreed that a test case be brought before the courts to establish whether or not Catholic high schools were entitled to government funding under the terms of the BNA Act. In 1925, Catholics in the Township of Tiny (Simcoe County) launched the legal challenge--poetically named "Tiny vs. The King." By 1928, the highest court of appeal in the British Empire--the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council--offered a bittersweet decision on the Catholic high school issue: Catholics, due to the pre-Confederation precedents and the subsequent development of the "fifth book"

continuation classes had just claims to funding for grades nine and ten; but Catholics had no constitutional right to funding beyond that, although the Provincial government was at liberty to grant it, if it desired.

This was of small consolation to the Catholic community. The pressures on Catholic schools were many. In 1900 there were 42,397 students in the system; twenty-five years later the Catholic school population had more than doubled to 95,300 students. A low municipal tax base, a minute share of the business tax (only Catholic businesses who wished to direct their taxes to separate schools), slim government grants, and a caution to keep their tax rates competitive with the affluent public school boards, collectively spelled financial hardship for Catholic schools. Facilities were old, classrooms generally were crowded, the growing ranks of lay teachers were paid less, and programs of study were limited in both breadth and variety. Despite the fact that Catholic schools matriculated students who were competitive with their peers in the public system, and although Catholic youth moved on to University in greater numbers by the 1930s, Catholic schools were still saddled with the label of "inferiority." The onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s threatened the very existence of the system.

As it had so many times in its history, the Catholic community rallied to save its schools. By the 1930s the mantle of leadership in the fight for Catholic education was passed from the clergy to the laity. Martin J. Quinn, a Toronto businessman, organized the Catholic Taxpayers Association to lobby the Provincial Government to secure the equitable distribution of corporate and business taxes to Catholic school boards. With chapters in over 400 parishes across the Province, the CTA helped to elect the Mitchell Hepburn's Liberals in 1934, and subsequently his government passed the much sought legislation in 1936. The victory on the corporate tax issue, however was short lived. In December 1936, a wild by-election fight in East Hastings, reminiscent of the sectarian explosions of the 1850s, spelled disaster for the Liberals and convinced Premier Hepburn that the fair

distribution of business taxes to Catholics would defeat his government in the next general election. The bill was withdrawn and the Catholic community's hope for economic justice was dashed.

Canada's involvement in World War II (1939-45) effectively ended the Great Depression. The postwar situation, however, merely heightened the crisis facing Catholic schools. Renewed migration from Europe, particularly from the Catholic communities of Southern and Central Europe, and the natural increase in population that came as a result of "the baby boom," placed increased demands on Ontario's Catholic schools. More spaces were needed for the increasing number of students in Ontario's cities, particularly Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto. The suburbanisation of Ontario in the 1950s necessitated new Catholic schools in rural areas. A decline in religious orders and the increase in the numbers of lay teachers placed additional financial burdens on school boards that were already desperately trying to keep their school facilities and programs up to Provincial standards.

In 1950, the offer of the Hope Commission (Ontario's first Royal Commission on Education) to fund Catholic schools fully to the end of grade six, but not to subsequent grades was indeed tempting. Such ideas posed an interesting dilemma for Catholic leaders: an abbreviated but equally and fully funded system at the primary-junior level or, a complete system from Kindergarten to Grade 13 only partially funded, and ever-struggling at the secondary level. The Catholic commissioners, after much deliberation with the Ontario Bishops, decided to dissent from the Commission; they submitted a brief minority report, highlighted by historian Franklin Walker's readable and concise (less than 90 pages) outline of the history and constitutionality of Catholic schools. In contrast, the overdue and oversized (900 pages plus) majority report of the Hope Commission was generally ignored, as was its demand for a scaling back of government funding to separate schools. The system would survive but would continue to struggle, given the many demands

placed upon it by a growing and increasingly upwardly mobile Catholic population.

Given the demographic, economic, and social pressures facing the Catholic schools, Catholics once again rallied for justice. The Ontario Separate School Trustees' Association (OSSTA), the fledgling Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and the English Catholic Education Association of Ontario (ECEAO) worked hard as individual groups and, at times, cooperatively, to better the situation of their schools. Cooperative lobbying efforts bore fruit in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Ministry of Education initiated such programs as "equalized assessment," the "growth needs factor," and Ontario Foundation Tax Plan (1963) to "have-not" boards. Many separate school boards gleaned additional funds by means of these programs. In 1969, rural boards were amalgamated into larger county-based units with the hope that larger boards would have access to more funds, be more efficient, and provide improved programs and facilities. Together, the funding provided by the Foundation Tax Plan, and the opportunities created by board restructuring, meant a new influx of cash into Catholic elementary schools.

Catholic high schools, however, continued to suffer. Funded only at an elementary level for its junior grades and sustained principally by tuition fees for the senior grades, Catholics were forced to develop innovative ways to keep the high schools afloat. To make matters worse, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a decline in vocations to religious life, and a slow erosion through increased retirements within the existing cadre of priests, brothers, and sisters in the schools. High schools depended on lay teachers accepting lower salary levels, parents operating lotteries and bingos, and students helping to clean and maintain school facilities. In the election of 1971, the Progressive Conservative government of William Davis won a healthy majority sustained, in part, by its public refusal to extend funding to Catholic high schools. When this same government proposed changes to Ontario's tax laws that would see Catholic high school property subject to taxation, it appeared that Catholic High Schools were about

to sing their death song. In 1976, the Blair Commission traveled the province to assess the reaction to the tax plan and was greeted at each stop with formidable submissions by the Catholic "partners." Through the combined efforts of clergy, trustees, teachers, parents and students, the tax plan was scrapped and Catholic high schools dodged a bullet. Ironically, in 1984, William Davis surprised his own caucus when he announced that there would be extended funding to grades eleven, twelve and thirteen in Ontario's Catholic schools. Davis regarded the decision as "justice" to Catholic schools; the cynical saw the government fishing for Catholic votes. Within three years, having faced and survived constitutional challenges, Ontario's Catholic schools finally enjoyed extended funding from junior kindergarten to the end of Grade Thirteen. Funds poured into the Catholic system and the landscape of Ontario bore the imprint of new schools, complete with facilities, equipment, and comforts scarcely imagined in previous generations.

In our own time, both the Catholic and Public education systems have witnessed an unprecedented "revolution" of institutional and curricular change. In 1995, school councils were instituted to bring parents and teachers together for the local management of their community schools. Shortly thereafter the Progressive Conservative government reduced the number of school boards, in addition to cutting the numbers of school trustees, while placing a cap on their salaries. In 1997, in a move that may have startled Ryerson himself, the Provincial Government suspended the right of trustees to raise taxes for schools and placed educational funding exclusively in the hands of the Provincial Government. For the first time in Ontario's educational history funding for education is no longer a shared responsibility between the local community and the central government. For Catholics, however, the new financing model means equality of funding for Catholic and Public schools. Those who have reflected upon the history of their schools have realized that finally justice has been accorded to Catholics, under the terms of the Constitution (BNA) Act. Not all Catholics, however, have been in favour of the changes; teachers and

others have seen this new centralization as jeopardizing the ability of Catholics control and manage their own schools. There is some fear that the Provincial Government will take an increased role in dictating to Catholic schools, perhaps to the detriment of the distinct denominational character of these schools. In the current ideological climate dominated by the proverbial "bottom line" and secular values, it is believed by some that the "taxpayers" of Ontario will be loath to support two education systems. In addition, the demise of publicly funded Catholic schools in Quebec and Newfoundland has contributed to a growing uneasiness about the future of Ontario's Catholic schools.

Catholics in Ontario must be awake to the "signs of the times." With legislation supporting funding equity in hand, Catholics cannot afford to become complacent about their education system. In a secular and pluralistic society, denominational rights, particularly in the matter of schools, are not widely subscribed. Those who know the story of the development of Catholic schools in this province must realize that these schools are a gift that should not be squandered. Ontario's Catholics have a responsibility to nourish, improve and defend their schools as a **distinctive and valuable** contribution to the vitality of their faith community and to Ontario society as a whole. As history has demonstrated and as Vatican II has confirmed, the laity have a vital role to play in the development of Catholic education. There is a need for schools that place Gospel values at the centre of a holistic education. In Ontario, our inheritance as Catholics has been considerable, but so are the challenges that, no doubt, the future will bring.

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## **Catholic Schools Caught in a Bind**

BY ROBERT DIXON

Catholic Register Special

If one were to ask the average Ontario citizen who attends Catholic schools, most likely the answer would be, “Obviously Catholics.” That has been the correct answer since 1841 when the province’s legislature created separate schools. It is still the right answer with regard to Catholic elementary schools. But the situation is different in a significant number of Catholic secondary schools.

Prior to 1984 only Catholics for the most part attended them. However, their student body now includes non-Catholics varying in size from 10 per cent to 50 per cent of the school’s total enrolment. These figures arose in my own research in six dioceses in the province — Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Peterborough, London and Thunder Bay — involving a sample of 17 schools. They were representative of the province’s multicultural urban settings as well as more ethnically homogeneous suburbs.

How did this come about? How does this affect the life of the Catholic high school? Should the legislation be changed?

The change came when Premier William Davis in 1984 announced that the Ontario legislature would be completing the separate school system to the end of high school. No longer would Grades 10 to 13 be privately funded. They would be under the jurisdiction of separate school boards. Prior to his announcement, Davis met with representatives of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) to convey several conditions. One of them was that there should be universal access to publicly funded Catholic high schools for children of both public and separate school supporters.

OCCB’s education officer, Msgr. Kenneth Robitaille, and an expert on separate school matters, Fr. Raymond Durocher, prepared for the bishops a commentary in response to Davis’ proposal. With regard to open access for students, they wrote that that requirement did not make sense because the highest court in the land had described a separate school as one characterized by a class of people united by one faith, by trustees elected by these people, by teachers of the same faith selected by the trustees, by programs controlled by the trustees which reflect the tenets of the faith, and by pupils of the same faith. In other words, separate school trustees have a constitutional right to admit only Catholics to their schools and to accept a non-Catholic student only on an exceptional basis.

Nevertheless, the OCCB decided to accept the premier's condition. In a public statement and a pastoral guideline, the bishops expressed their assurance that the arrangements required with reference to the admission of non-Catholic pupils could be made without endangering the Catholic character of the Catholic high schools. They also expressed the concept that the admission of non-Catholic students was congruent with the ecumenical mission of the Catholic school.

By the time the Ontario legislature considered Bill 30 on funding for Catholic high schools, there was a minority government under Liberal Premier David Peterson. His minister of education, Sean Conway, presented legislation which provided for non-Catholic students who needed to attend a Catholic high school for reasons of special programs or geographical accessibility, or who simply wished to enrol in a Catholic high school. Students attending the school out of necessity would be exempted from religious education. The others would have to apply for exemption to the separate board, which could grant or refuse the request. Furthermore, admission of non-Catholics would be subject to the availability of space. After first reading of Bill 30, the legislation was referred to the standing committee on social development.

The Committee's New Democratic Party and Progressive Conservative members objected to the space limitation to open access and to the trustees' power to grant or refuse exemption from religious education classes and asked that these clauses be removed from the bill. Conway realized that refusal to accede to their demands could result in the defeat of the bill at second reading — the PCs and NDP constituted a majority of the legislature. The final version of Bill 30 provided that any child of a public or separate school supporter could attend a Catholic high school and that no child of a public school supporter would be required to take part in any program or course of study in religious education where a parent or guardian applied in writing to the Catholic school board for exemption.

Since the passage of Bill 30, more than 80 new English Catholic high schools have opened. They, as well as the previously existing Catholic high schools, have attracted a large percentage of non-Catholic students. Why do they come? A reason often stated is the Catholic high schools have a reputation for discipline. Equally common is the preference of some Protestant and Muslim parents to provide religious teaching for their children and the realization that such teaching in the pluralist public schools is impossible. There are, however, other motives that have little to do with religious education. Students, Catholic and non-Catholic, are attracted to the many new, state-of-the-art Catholic high schools. As well, in some cases, the non-Catholic student wishes to attend the Catholic high school with her or his Catholic friends. Finally, sometimes the geographic proximity of the non-Catholic student's home to the Catholic school or to a special program offered in the Catholic school motivates the student.

Has this created a problem? The issue is intimately connected to the Catholic high school's curriculum considered in its widest terms — the total experience of the students in the school — and in its object of integrating Catholic beliefs and teachings into all the courses of study in the school. In 2001 I conducted a research study on the needs of chaplains, religious education department heads and religious education teachers. Among a number of their most commonly expressed needs was their desire for an answer to the "open-access" problem. Chaplains asked for direction on how to deal with non-Catholic students where they constituted a large percentage



of the student body. In such circumstances, chaplains sometimes had to cancel school Masses because of negative peer pressure. Teachers pleaded for a religious education program and class groupings that would help them deal with religiously heterogeneous classes. Some religious education department heads suggested that the only non-Catholic students who should be admitted were those who agreed to participate totally in the religion program and who explained in a well-thought-out written statement why they wanted to come to a Catholic high school. They realized, however, that the existing legislation prevented them from making such conditions mandatory.

In short, the religious education staff in schools where there is a large group of non-Catholics experiences the task of building a pastor-teacher-parent-student Catholic community as a more demanding one. They are aware that theoretically they have the opportunity to evangelize their non-Catholic students. But they ask how they are to do this, especially with the non-Catholic students who opt out of religious education. Furthermore, are they to presume that the parents wish their Protestant and Muslim children to be evangelized in the Catholic faith?

There is a second serious problem. In 1985 no one anticipated that there would be such an influx of non-Catholics to the Catholic high schools. The Catholic school board cannot even give preference to the Catholic elementary school graduates. Open access means, in some cases, non-Catholic students are taking the space originally provided for the Catholic student body. Thus, unless portables are added, a Catholic student might have to attend another high school.

A quiet debate among a few members of the Catholic school community has been simmering over whether to view the presence of non-Catholic students as an opportunity to evangelize, or to request the legislature to remove the open-access provision by statutory amendment on the grounds that open access is now hindering the mission of the Catholic high school. The issue has important legal and political overtones.

There is no doubt that constitutionally separate schools have the guaranteed right to admit only Catholics to a separate school, and the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized the Catholic high school as a separate school. Clearly then the sections on open access in Ontario's Education Act are unconstitutional. But there is the possibility of a backlash against Catholic high schools on the part of some politicians and members of the public. They might argue that these are publicly supported institutions and that shutting out non-Catholics is discriminatory and renders Catholic high schools undeserving of continued support. One could reply that no one expects the Ukrainian-language Catholic schools or French-language schools to admit non-Ukrainians or non-francophones, yet they are part of the publicly supported school system of the province. But debates involving separate school rights have had a long and recurring history. Some Catholics may not have the appetite to revisit this topic.

The issue remains vexing. It is time for the Catholic community to thoroughly examine the matter. Perhaps one solution would be to ask the government to amend the legislation so that only those non-Catholic parents who commit their children to take part in the total religious education curriculum may send their children to a Catholic high school.

(Dixon is the author of *Be a Teacher and Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario, 1964-2001*, just published by the Catholic Education Foundation of Ontario.)

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## Address by Sister Clare Fitzgerald\* to the Catholic Education Community in Renfrew, Ontario - 1999

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There's a pressing need for Catholic educators in the province of Ontario to come together, to look at themselves, and what we are supposed to be doing in Catholic education. Look over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century...Two World Wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. We had the Holocaust, and now we're ending the century with Kosovo.

History, despite all its wrenching pain, cannot undo what has happened...and nobody can change the next century except educators. Politicians can't change it. Congress will never change anything.

The only people who have the power to change anything in the world are the educators. Why? Because we change people's minds. We give them new thoughts. And we say to them "this is not the way people should live.

So that you and I, teachers and educators, we are the most powerful people in the very best sense of that word, because we influence minds.

We tell children, "Hey, you don't have to live like that, that's not the way human beings treat one another". We change people's thinking...that's the power of an educator. Nobody has that but us. And that's what we've come here together today to celebrate.

The only thing that will save Catholic education – in Ontario or anywhere else - is Catholic education. In other words, you've got to really be Schools to believe in! You've got to be what you claim to be.

Unless you prove that you're different, distinctive, with something of value to offer then you'll not be tax supported. Remember, you are trying to function in a culture, in a political, social and economic milieu that challenges the very fundamental principles of your education system.

The very promise and meaning of Catholic education is embedded in spiritual, religious, and Catholic roots, and anything that threatens those roots will cause a profound disturbance in Catholic education.

We can't give up those religious Catholic roots and think we are going to survive. What are these roots we are talking about? What Catholic identity, what religious traditions? What claims can we make about our Catholic schools that show us to be different than other schools?

In our Catholic schools, we proclaim something. We happen to believe there's a God. And in today's world, that's a novelty. We believe in Him and we proclaim Him. And you have no philosophy of education, you have no pedagogy, you have no reason to enter the classroom unless you believe in that statement.

When I walk in a classroom as a Catholic teacher, when I see my students, I have to know that each one of them is a child of God, created by God, for God, and that they are destined to go home to God. If you do not believe that, you're in the wrong school. I believe there's a God and that we're all going home. This whole journey on this earth is a journey home to God. That's the whole basis of our educational system. We are here to nourish that child on the journey home.

As well as proclaim, we must provide. In every one of our schools we must provide space and time for the sacred, for the holy. Retreat time, prayer time. We also must provide space and time for the academics. To be Catholic is to be intellectual. As educators, this means we've got to love learning – that's the ballpark we're playing in.

We must proclaim and provide, and as Catholic schools we must also promote. We promote social justice. We promote a better world. There is an essential difference between Catholic education and public education. We both educate the child and transform the child. But Catholic educators also educate the child to transform the world. The goal and objective of Catholic education is the world. It is not the child. We are called to influence the world. Jesus Christ said go into the world and proclaim me. The world is the goal and the focus of our education systems. That child is being educated morally and ethically with the concept of social justice and peace to go out into that world and make a difference.

I encourage my students to become good lawyers and doctors and architects. They can climb the social ladder. They can even earn lots of money. But I need them to remember why they're doing it, and I want them to challenge a marketplace ethic that enriches the wealthy and impoverishes the poor. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if in the end he loses his immortal soul? That question is as good today as it was two centuries ago, but who's going to ask them that question if we don't?"

As Catholic educators, that question is part of our job.

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\* Sister Clare Fitzgerald is a teacher who has taught in elementary schools, in secondary and in post-graduate courses. She is a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She has served as Provincial Superior of her Congregation and was elected President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of the United States. She was one of the five religious to serve on the Vatican Commission for the Study of Religious Life in the United States.

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# “SCHOOLS TO BELIEVE IN – THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE”

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**Homily Delivered by Msgr. Dennis Murphy-  
Catholic Education Week - 1999**



**Schools to believe in –  
the difference we make**

This week here in Ontario Catholic schools and parishes are celebrating Catholic Education Week. The theme for the week is “Schools To Believe In - The Difference We Make.” No one pretends that there are not flaws in our Catholic schools but their particular approach to education does offer something distinctive not only to our Church but to our society as well. It also helps us to understand our own faith and how we seek to live it.

In a unique way Catholic schools tell young people that they are worthwhile - and that, above all else, they are worthwhile because they are from God and that their life is a journey of return to God. Throughout all aspects of the Catholic school’s curriculum children hear echoed the message of today’s gospel: “You are my friends ..... I do not call you servants ... because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” And so Catholic schools tell children that they are valuable. Children hear repeatedly that at the heart of their lives there lives the spirit of God himself. They tell them that no young person lives on the margin of **God’s** love. In so doing Catholic schools tell young people who they really are.

In a world which suggests all too often that what is right, and true and good, is what is fashionable and what is hip. In a world which says that what counts is being cool. In this world Catholic schools keep repeating in all kinds of ways that truth and goodness are more important than what is cool.

Catholic schools do this in very distinctive ways. A keystone of Catholic education is that everyone of us is equal - not because of some law or Charter of Rights and Freedoms - but because each of us is **created** equal by a loving God. And because this is so, children learn - not only in Religion class - but in every subject that Christians cannot accept any political systems or policies which tend to grind up little people and leave them by the roadside.

There is distinctiveness as well when teachers tell students that sex is great, and wonderful, and sacred. And that it is not to be squandered or violated in casual relationships, but treasured and respected as part of the mysterious gift of life itself. In like fashion Catholic schools insist at every turn that life itself is an unmerited gift. That we are entrusted with life but do not own it. And that we are called to cherish and protect it in all its manifestations.

Two or three years ago the Catholic School Trustees’ Association commissioned some focus group research to determine how the Catholic school was perceived by the citizens of Ontario. Some of these focus groups were made up of Catholics, some of non-Catholics, some of them

were older people and some of them younger people. Part of the research involved the facilitator asking the members of each group to speak the first word that came to their mind when they thought of Catholic schools. The word that far outstripped all other words as defining these schools, the word that came from both Catholics and non-Catholics, the word that came from both young and old was **community**.

After all is said and done Catholic schools are about creating small Christian communities which are meant to mirror the values of the home and the Church. This is the learning environment Catholic educators seek to create.

What these communities provide to students in this fragmented society of ours is a zone and a sense of personal stability. Amidst all of the many voices and messages with which young people are bombarded, amidst all they learn from the media, what they hear on Muchmusic, what they read in the newspapers and watch on Television - amidst all these voices they need of a word and a voice which assures them some stability. They need some clear and uncompromising sense of identity which only community can offer.

What Catholic schools seek to offer to our young people is a message and a voice which speaks with consistency, coherence, and continuity. Young people, indeed all of us need such a sense of meaning when confronted with some of the apparently meaningless horror which we all experience, such as the tragedy which devastated so many school people, children and parents these past ten days in both Littleton, Colorado and Taber, Alberta.

In short, kids need a culture and environment that allows them, in all of the noise of the contemporary world to hear the whisper of the Spirit, the gentle urging of Jesus, the call of God. Perhaps they will not follow in the way of that word and that call today. Perhaps they will not even follow in its way tomorrow. But for all of their life they will have learned how to listen to God. They will have spent many hours in a community which tells them who they really are - a community which ever echoes the word of Jesus in today's gospel, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." This finally is why Catholic schools are distinctive, and why they are schools to believe in. What these schools offer to our kids is a gift not only to our Church but to our society as well.

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# Catholic School Values

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*Daniel M. Buechlein*  
*America, April 24, 1999 – Vol. 180, No. 14*

We place enormous value on our Catholic schools and work hard to foster the faith tradition which has supported them in this country since before the foundation of the republic. At a time when the success of Catholic schools is so widely admired, it might be well to reflect on those values that make these schools Catholic and what they mean to us as individuals, families and communities, understanding that Catholics are not the only ones who reverence these values.

I am not going to list all the things that we Catholics believe, although this rich tradition of faith is the foundation that supports every Catholic school. I am also not going to discuss those values that are unique to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church. Instead, I would like to mention briefly 10 values that we Catholics share with many other religious traditions. These values may not be unique to Catholic schools, but they are deeply imbedded in everything that our schools stand for – in our teaching, in our character formation, in athletics and in all our extracurricular activities. We don't claim to be perfect, or without fault, in our witness to these values, but we also don't try to "water them down" simply because they are difficult or counter-cultural.

What are these 10 Catholic school values? I'm sure that you will recognize them right away.

*We believe that these  
'natural laws' are  
inscribed in the human  
heart by God as  
fundamental principles  
of human behaviour.*

1. The first value is that *God comes first*. No individual or group, no doctrine or ideology, no material thing or spiritual experience can come before God. We believe in a personal, loving God who has been revealed through creation, through human conscience and through direct action in the world and in our lives. Catholic schools do not impose this belief (or any of our values) on people who do not share our faith. But everything about Catholic schools should proclaim this fundamental conviction or value. For us, God comes first.
2. The second value that Catholic schools represent is *reverence for the sacred*. We believe that a person is not fully human or truly free unless he or she can recognize and respect genuine spiritual realities. We want our Catholic school graduates to be keenly aware of the mysteries of life – at the same time that they are fully prepared for life's practical, day-to-day realities. We believe that the very name of the Lord is holy, and we try to teach our students (and ourselves) that true wisdom involves a sense of majesty, awe and reverence for the things of God.
3. The third Catholic school value reflects a theme that Pope John Paul II has recently stressed: *the importance of Sunday, the Lord's day*. Time is sacred, the Pope reminds us. We honour

God and one another when we set aside at least one day each week for prayer, worship and the kinds of leisure activities that truly enrich individuals, families and communities. Catholic schools promote responsible stewardship of the gift of time. We believe that healthy individuals and communities learn how to balance work and play with worship and service to others.

4. Fourth, we value *parents and families*. We recognize the family as the first unit of the Church and of society. We even call families the "domestic Church." And we want to do everything in our power to help families remain spiritually vital, as well as materially secure, in spite of the many social and cultural influences that threaten family life today. Especially today we want our Catholic schools to reflect a deep reverence and respect for the senior members of our community – our parents and grandparents – who have given so much to our families and communities and who still have so much more to offer us as a result of their wisdom and experience.
5. The fifth Catholic school value is absolutely central to who we are and what we believe. Catholic schools proclaim *the dignity and sacredness of every human person* – from the first moment of conception to the final moments of natural death. We believe that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. We treat our students, their families and every member of the school community as unique and gifted persons – regardless of race, religion or economic or social circumstance. We want every child to have a chance – and every parent to have a choice – in the great adventure that education is meant to be. Above all, we want to communicate to our students the profound respect for life that we believe is at the heart of all truly human values.
6. The sixth Catholic school value is *a positive understanding of the beauty and dignity of human sexuality*. At a time when we are overwhelmed by negative sexual images in the news media and the entertainment industry, this may be our most counter-cultural value. We believe that God created human sexuality to unite man and woman in a sanctified married life and to bring forth new life in the stability and harmony of family life. Seen in this context, there is nothing more wondrous or joyful than sexual love. But we also know that, divorced from marriage and family, sex can be very dangerous and destructive. This is the view of sex that we want to share with our children – through clear, consistent teaching and through programs that emphasize abstinence, chastity and a true appreciation for this precious gift from God.
7. The seventh value is *respect for the material world* that God has entrusted to our care as stewards of all creation. This value acknowledges that each of us has a right – and a duty – to care for our own property and possessions, but also for the great bounty we have received from God's goodness: the land we work, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat (and share with others). We believe that God has made us stewards of the earth and

*We don't claim to be perfect in our witness to these values, but we also don't try to "water them down" simply because they are difficult or counter-cultural.*



its fullness. That is why we respect one another's property. It is also why we commit ourselves to economic justice and political responsibility among all nations and people of the earth.

8. The eighth Catholic school value is to *tell the truth*. Pope John Paul II has written forcefully about the splendour of truth and its essential connection to human freedom. Lies deceive, corrupt and enslave us. Invariably they cause pain, embarrassment and humiliation for everyone involved. We believe in telling the truth, but we also believe in charity and respect for the privacy of others. Talk shows and tabloid journalism do not serve the truth when they "tell all" without regard to the good and safety of others, or when they fail to have respect for privacy or the common good. In an age when doublespeak and spin doctoring are everywhere, we can give our children no greater gift than a profound appreciation for the plain, unvarnished truth.
1. The last two Catholic school values speak directly to the human heart. The ninth value is *purity of heart*, which involves honesty, simplicity and genuine desire for what is right and good. In human relationships, this means treating others with dignity and respect. It also means resisting the temptation to treat other people as objects that we use to gratify our personal needs or desires.
10. The final Catholic school value is also a counter-cultural value. It is the very opposite of the modern belief that happiness will come from acquiring (and consuming) more and more of what the world has to offer. A heart that is burdened by a consuming desire for wealth, prestige or power will never be free. We believe that true happiness comes when *we let go of our attachment to worldly things* and honestly turn our attention to the things of the spirit. So the tenth Catholic school value is "to seek first the kingdom of God," confident that all the rest will follow.

Of course you recognize these 10 values. We call them the Ten Commandments. They are not unique to Catholic schools. They come from the Hebrew Scriptures as a direct revelation from God to Moses, but they also reflect basic religious and moral principles that have guided countless peoples and cultures throughout human history. As such, we believe that these "natural laws" have been inscribed in the human heart by God as fundamental principles that should govern human behaviour.

These values are the foundation for every Catholic school curriculum. They also form the basis for our schools' strong commitment to service in the Church and in the wider community. Because we are human, we are not perfect in our witness to these values. But we insist that they remain as fundamental principles that challenge all of us – students, parents, teachers, educators and religious leaders – to make these values our own and to share them joyfully with others.

We believe that schools built on this foundation make a difference. Better families, better businesses and better communities are the result.

The church has reason to be grateful to all who work in our Catholic schools for their quiet but very powerful witness to these Catholic school values. And the Church is grateful for the prayers and financial support of the broad Catholic community. We can see that in a world so in need of values, our schools are making a difference.

The Most Rev. Daniel M. Buechlein, O.S.B., is Archbishop of Indianapolis

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# Catholic Education in Other Provinces

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## ***Newfoundland***

Under the Terms of Union by which Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation in 1949 the existing denominational school structure was preserved. Educational guarantees were given to seven different religious denominations - there were no nondenominational schools in Newfoundland. Unfortunately, this system was characterized by inefficiency and duplication. A Royal Commission in 1992 recommended reform.

After three years of discussion, from 1994 to 1996, a proposal was developed by the government of Premier Clyde Wells which would permit the creation of interdenominational (one school serving more than one religious denomination) and some uni-denominational schools, but with greater control being exercised by the province. A referendum vote held September 5, 1996, resulted in a vote of 55% in favour of reform. Despite bitter opposition from those supporting denominational education, these amendments to the Terms of the Union were approved by governments of both Newfoundland and Canada.

Parents were faced with a choice of registering their children at either an inter or uni-denominational school. Catholic and Pentecostal groups success in securing a temporary injunction against the closing of denominational schools. Premier Brian Tobin responded with a

second referendum in September 1997, asking citizens to indicate whether they supported a single school system where "religious education and religious observance is permitted." Seventy two percent approval in the referendum, and subsequent approval of the new amendment to Term 17 by the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada removed all publicly funded religious schools from the landscape of that province. Although religious education (education about religion) and religious observance are initially protected, it is likely that they will quickly fall victim to Charter challenges, and soon disappear.

## ***Quebec***

In Quebec, a 1997 amendment to Section 93 (1)(4)A of the Constitution Act 1867 took away constitutional protection for Protestant and Catholic denominational school boards, and replaced them with linguistic school boards.

Quebec's Education Act still explicitly permits a school, in consultation with parents, to designate itself Catholic or Protestant. The right to make such a designation operates notwithstanding the freedom of religion and equality rights provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The notwithstanding clause must be renewed every five years.

When considering the impact of these events in relation to the situation in Ontario, we must remember that the historical, cultural and ecclesiastical context in which changes to Catholic schools in Newfoundland and Quebec occurred are markedly different from those in Ontario. Events in Newfoundland, for example, were certainly impacted by long-standing concern over a totally Church-run, cumbersome, and costly school system, and the strong reaction caused by the abuse scandals.

Many advocates for a single publicly funded system in Ontario have argued that changes in school governance, similar to those that have taken place in Quebec and Newfoundland-Labrador, could be made in Ontario.

It would be foolhardy for those of us concerned with Catholic education in Ontario not to examine and learn from the Newfoundland and Quebec experiences.

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# Complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

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On November 3, 1999, the United Nations Human Rights Committee released its rulings on two complaints of importance to Catholic schools in Ontario.

One complaint had been filed by Grant Tadman and supporters of the group “Friends of Public Education in Ontario.” Mr. Tadman had asked the Committee for a finding that Ontario government funding of Catholic schools only is discriminatory and contrary to certain articles of the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights. He recommended the removal of funding to Catholic schools in Ontario.

The UN Committee found this complaint inadmissible, on the grounds that Mr. Tadman had not sufficiently substantiated how the funding of Ontario’s Catholic schools disadvantaged him or affected him adversely.

The second complaint was filed by Ariel Waldman, the father of children attending a private Jewish school. Mr. Waldman asked for the same finding as Mr. Tadman. However, his recommendation was that the government fund all religious schools that meet provincial standards in Ontario at a level equivalent to the funding received by Ontario’s Roman Catholic schools.

The UN Committee ruled that the funding of only one faith-based school system is discriminatory in that it contravenes article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United Nations Committee recommended the provision of public funding to all religious schools in Ontario without discrimination. The Committee’s rulings have no legal force.

In response to the UN Committee’s decision, the Minister of Education at the time, Janet Ecker, reiterated the Ontario government’s commitment to supporting both the Catholic and the public school systems.

The faith-based schools lobby in Ontario continues to advocate for public funding of religious schools and to urge the Federal Government to respond to the 1999 UN Committee ruling.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association supports financial assistance for faith-based schools that meet the current standards and accountability measures required for publicly-funded education in Ontario.

# *This Moment of Promise*

*A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in Ontario*

ADULT EDUCATION

ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

*Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989  
Reprinted 2000*

# ***This Moment of Promise***

*A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in Ontario*

## ***PART ONE: The Call of This Moment***

### ***PART TWO: A Distinctive Thread***

*Woven in Faith, Weaving in Hope  
The Texture of the Times  
Interweaving the Strands of the  
Catholic Community*

- *Students*
- *Parents*
- *Professional Educators*
- *Trustees*
- *Priests*

### ***PART THREE: The Social Fabric of Ontario***

PART ONE

## *The Call of This Moment*

The past five years have been a time of historic change for Catholic education in Ontario. Innovative pieces of provincial legislation, completing the Catholic separate school system and providing for management by official language minorities, have opened up new educational challenges for all of us. These decisions, supported by all political parties and based on earlier and recent requirements of Canada's Constitution, present us with new possibilities as well as problems. This is not the moment to simply let things happen or to merely react as situations develop. This moment of promise and risk demands that the Catholic community discern with care and with confidence the steps that lie ahead within the total panorama of education in Ontario.

Conscious of our responsibility as pastoral leaders of the Roman Catholic Church of Ontario, we want to share with our people in choosing those directions which will preserve and promote truly Catholic education. In working out these choices together, we can at the same time make a significant contribution towards the building up of the life of this province and of this country. Canadian society continues to define itself as one in which communitarian values (linguistic, cultural, religious) are respected rather than denied. We have staked our hope as a nation on the possibility of strengthening our common social fabric by safeguarding the distinctive quality of each thread within it. Our ongoing commitment to the development of Catholic education represents one such contribution to the common fabric. By reinforcing this distinctive thread of what is best in our Church community, we want to enhance the unique qualities of other communities and the ties which bind us all together.

Our commitment to cultivating the special characteristics of Catholic education, and thus enhancing the fabric of society, impels us to address first our brothers and sisters of the Catholic community and, then, our fellow-citizens of Ontario.

## PART TWO

# *A Distinctive Thread*

Many groups within the Church, each in a particular way, have contributed to the development of Catholic education in Ontario and to its honourable status within provincial educational structures. Our distinctive model of co-operation must be developed even further so that together we may help to realize the promise of this moment. Significant changes within our Church and within our culture have made co-responsibility, on the part of many groups in the Church, both necessary and possible.

### *Woven in Faith, Weaving in Hope*

The call to co-operate in the process of Catholic education becomes all the more clear when we reflect on the impressive history of Catholic schools from their inception before Confederation. Our schools were built as the result of the conviction and sacrifice of countless teachers, parents, trustees and clergy. Religious communities, in particular, brought an ongoing care and commitment to the daily task of education.

All of these people were spurred on by the profound vision of life shaped by the message of Jesus Christ and by the tradition of the Church. These were great-hearted and often great-minded people. They paid a price for Catholic education willingly, even joyfully. And the price was not only financial — it was also deeply personal.

Lay people and clergy were significant and generous participants in this community of effort. Students introduced into this community of faith soon realized that religion was far more than a subject in the curriculum. It demanded self-discipline and a fair amount of doing without. But it was often the quality of the life of religious communities which infused itself into Catholic education as a result of the dedication of people whose vocation animated every dimension of their lives.

Over the years, with the increasing number of Catholic schools, the laity has been called upon to take more responsibility for Catholic education. Members of our Church elect Catholic men and women to act as trustees who will direct Catholic schools. Our teachers, supervisory officers and other education officials are mostly laymen and women.

This new reality invites all of us to enter more seriously into a model of Church set forth at the Second Vatican Council — a Church in which the various gifts of the people of God (from the Pope to the newly-confirmed) are respected and enhanced for the good of the whole Church.



The recent Synod on the Laity and our own history in Ontario give witness that the work of education provides an important opportunity for lay involvement and participation in the life of the Church. Schools are a particular expression of the life of the Church community and it is here that lay people have a crucial part to play in teaching and pastoral ministry.

"Catholic education is inspired by the general principles enunciated by the Second Vatican Council concerning collaboration between the hierarchy and those who work in the apostolate. In consequence of the principle of participation and co-responsibility, the various groupings which constitute the educational community are, according to their several competencies, to be associated in decision-making concerning the Catholic school and in the application of decisions once taken." (*The Catholic School*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para.70).

As bishops, we are committed to working together with parents and educators to realize this new possibility of becoming more of a Church community for the sake of our young people. Together we face the task of developing schools into communities of faith in which the requirements of good citizenship will be learned in a vital way from the perspective of the message of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.

In this light, the lessening of the financial burden of Catholic education must be seen as freeing us to make the collective and personal choices and sacrifices necessary to enhance our educational communities of faith. As Pope John Paul II said to us during our visit with him in April 1988, "Even though the financial viability of Catholic schools has been guaranteed, the task remains of ensuring their *Catholic character*." The great privilege of this new freedom cannot help but remind us that much is expected of those to whom much has been given (Luke 12:48).

## *Discussion Questions*

1. What are the major problems which you feel face the Catholic school system at the present time?
2. The "great privilege of this new freedom cannot help but remind us that much is expected of those to whom much has been given". Identify what new commitments and sacrifices may be asked of parents, teachers, trustees, students, and the clergy if Catholic education is to be a valid alternative.
3. What role do you see religious orders playing in the future of Catholic education?

## *The Texture of the Times*

The necessity of this common effort seems all the more urgent as we reflect on the present cultural context within which Catholic education takes place. Dramatic social changes are, for better and for worse, influencing the direction of our Catholic schools.

There are many social developments which have enhanced the quality of human life in this country: improved medical care, greater social security, wider access to education and stronger legal guarantees for the rights of all persons. However, the demoralizing materialism of our consumer culture is having an increasingly numbing effect on the human spirit. Pope John Paul II has vividly described the particular form of enslavement of those caught in the vicious circle of producing and consuming: "The more one possesses the more one wants, while deeper aspirations remain unsatisfied and perhaps even stifled." (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* IV.28)

Thus, although Catholic education must prepare students to live in this culture and to embrace all that is good in it, this effort should not be reduced simply to learning how to adapt to the world. While we are called to be constructive and creative in our contribution to society, we must also be critical of those aspects of our culture which are contrary to the values of our faith tradition.

- *In a world which ignores the human thirst for God, we are called to share the living waters of our faith.*
- *In a time when there is little reverence for the image of God in the human person, we are summoned to care for human life with an ultimate respect.*
- *In a culture where communication is increasingly commercialized, we are invited to prayer and to worship.*
- *In a world marked by poverty, oppression and war, we are commanded to work for justice and peace.*
- *In a society marked by personality cults, we are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, and to reverence him in the poor, the lowly, and the marginalized.*
- *In a time which often seems to be without goals or ennobling aspirations, we are challenged to declare ours and to dedicate our lives to their achievement.*
- *In an age which seems more fearful of the future, we are directed to give an account of the hope that is within us. (I Peter 3, 15)*

Our students cannot do this alone. We cannot do this alone. We all need to be members of a community which encourages each person in the difficult task of living according to faith values which are often at odds with the prevailing values of our society. Within a society which is increasingly secular, there is more need than ever before for an educational community which stakes its existence on the infinite promise which Jesus Christ has offered through his death and resurrection. He came that we may have life and have it more abundantly.

Given the increasing fragility of families and the overextension of parishes, it is becoming more obvious that the school, for some, is often the primary place where young people experience the Church as an alternative community which is shaped more by faith, hope and love than by the values of our consumer culture.

In this situation, those involved in Catholic education have an awesome privilege and responsibility. They are called not only to create an authentic faith community in the school but also to bring that community into communion with the parish and the wider Church community. "The educational community of a Catholic school should be trying to become a Christian community: a genuine community of faith." (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, S.C. for Catholic Education, 1982, para.41). Students deserve to discover their vocation in the universal Church and their roots in the long tradition of the Church.

A Catholic school can never be simply a place where students accumulate skills and information, a place where they learn how to get ahead and sell their gifts on the open market. If this were so, our schools would prepare students for nothing more than a shallow life far removed from the profound vision of life revealed by the gospel.

A Catholic school must be a place where all knowledge and relationships are transformed by questions of meaning, by the quest for meaning. We must have a profound respect for what is all too often repressed in this culture — that quiet voice which expresses the infinite desire of each person for God. We must "grasp firmly the challenge of providing a kind of education whose curriculum will be inspired more by reflection than by technique, more by a search for wisdom than by the accumulation of information." (Pope John Paul II, 1984, Newfoundland).

## Discussion Questions

1. In the daily life of a school, how should Catholic schools be different?
2. Identify trends or values in society which Catholic schools should be questioning.
3. How would you describe the kind of relationship which should exist between our schools and our parishes?

## A DISTINCTIVE THREAD

### *Interweaving the Strands of the Catholic Community*

The building of Catholic education communities has always been a creative endeavour which calls for the best which each one of us has to offer. Together, we must emphasize and in some cases discover the new responses and new solutions to the specific challenges which this moment offers us:

#### *Challenges . . .*

- We need to develop further and to articulate a Catholic philosophy of education for our times so that our distinctive vision of education will permeate every aspect of our curriculum and all dimensions of the learning process.
- Efforts in developing curriculum specifically for Catholic schools should continue. Religious education should not be reduced to one course in our schools. Rather, our whole educational process should become a religious activity. Faith should infuse every subject and aspect of our curriculum.
- Nevertheless, the central importance of religious education courses needs to be strengthened by working to ensure that these courses are credited at every grade level and by pursuing the necessary changes in provincial regulations so that aspiring teachers will be encouraged to specialize in theology and religious studies.
- As the system of public education evolves in its newly completed form, we must ensure that Separate School Boards retain the freedom, autonomy, and distinctiveness necessary to provide Catholic education.
- As members of the Catholic education community we are called to put our best energies into improving the co-operation with those in the public school system so that together we may ensure the best possible education for every student in this province.
- Together we shall work to establish a method of financing so that every child in the province of Ontario will have equal opportunity for quality education in the schools chosen by his or her parents.
- Within our Catholic school system, energetic commitments must continue to ensure that the women of this present and of future generations will be assured of experiencing their inherent dignity and quality as persons.
- We must further develop within our educational system adult education programs which will encourage adults to recognize Catholic schools as a wonderful resource, particularly

for programs which reflect our educational philosophy. This is a resource not only for their children but also for themselves. Educators can enlist parents, guardians, and other adults in determining the programs needed within the community.

- It is time to reflect together again on those factors which help or hinder this communally based education. Are there questions to be asked about the size of school buildings, the professionalization of education and the strictures of bureaucratic procedures, for example?
- Since the future development of our Catholic schools will depend significantly on the educational leaders of tomorrow, let us find creative and coherent ways of identifying and developing the most promising Catholic leadership potential within our school system.
- All of this we should do with an attitude to our stewardship which will ensure the intelligent use of our resources and due regard to the other needs of society.

As pastors called to serve all, as guides providing spiritual, moral and doctrinal direction, as links to the universal Church, we bishops in Ontario are committed to playing our appropriate part in this co-operative effort. As Pope John Paul II reminded us (during our visit with him in April 1988) we "have a special responsibility to be authentic teachers and instructors in the Faith." It is because of this responsibility that we want to address each of the partner groups involved in Catholic education at this promising time.

### *Students*

We invite you to become active participants in the process of Catholic education. We urge you to bring your energy, enthusiasm and generosity to the task of building a Catholic community within your school and to shaping the vision of Catholic education. Your strengths and your weaknesses, your joys and your fears, your struggles and your searchings will be welcomed in this community. Whatever your age, you are not too young to assume responsibility with and for your fellow students. You are a most significant educational influence on each other. You can help each other become disciples of Jesus Christ or you can hinder each other from becoming everything you are called to be. How you are with one another now will significantly influence how you will be with others as adults. The future of the Church and its mission of service in the world will be yours. For this you will need courage, self-discipline and all the love you are able to give. Take up the challenge of growing into a sense of who you are as Christians so that you can develop the talents you have been given and bring the best of yourself to the society in which you will be living.

### *Parents*

You are the primary educators of your children. Catholic schools can only extend and complement the educational process which you have begun and are continuing with your children. We encourage you to take your own faith development as seriously as you take that of your children. We invite you to become more involved in shaping educational policies and directions — particularly those dealing with religious and family life education programs, personal development courses, and child and day care programs. Seek out and insist on ways of

becoming more closely related to those who are teaching your children. Consider the opportunities offered by parent organizations in our schools. Catholic schools will be greatly enriched by your efforts to bridge the gap between parish, home and school.

We realize there are times when you are under the kind of stress which makes your task as parents or guardians and educators all the more difficult. In situations where there is only one parent or where both parents are working, there is little energy for anything beyond work and/or home. We have also heard your feelings of confusion and inadequacy when faced with some of the problems your children are going through. Catholic schools do not expect to deal with perfect students or perfect parents. They are there for parents who care enough to want their children to grow in a sense of values and faith.

### *Professional Educators*

You who are professional educators are the ones involved most directly in creating the learning climate within Catholic schools.

"Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community. The religious dimension of the school climate is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, in friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships, and in a ready availability. Through this daily witness, the students will come to appreciate the uniqueness of the environment to which their youth has been entrusted. If it is not present, then there is little left which can make the school Catholic. (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, S.C. for Catholic Education, 1988, para.26).

### *Teachers*

Parents entrust their sons and daughters to you for a large part of the day. Society confides its future citizens to you. The Church entrusts members of the Body of Christ to your care. Perhaps this is why we expect so much of you — not only professional competence and care but also the integrity of a Christian life. It is also why we have such a debt of gratitude to you.

There is no doubt that it is you who bear the heat of the day in Catholic education. The daily pressures you face are enormous and the rewards of teaching are sometimes long in coming. You deserve the support and understanding of all those involved in Catholic education. It is not necessary to be free of faults and failures to be faithful to the integrity of the process of Catholic education. Otherwise, none of us would dare to be involved. However, your example is the one that will have the greatest direct impact on students. We wish to do all we can to sustain you as you carry this great responsibility.

As your Catholic professional associations have recognized, it is only through ongoing faith development that teachers can hope to meet the challenge of this moment — the challenge of forming educational communities of faith. Courses in religious education, family life education, spirituality and theology are already offered. To these courses must be added others in areas such as the history and philosophy of Catholic education. We support your desire to be

involved in these experiences. It is your ongoing education and your own deepening experience in the Catholic tradition which will expand your capacity to help students to become more constructive, creative and critical within our society.

### *Principals and Vice-Principals*

As no one else, you who are principals and vice-principals have a unique opportunity to create the character of your school. Your reach extends both into the classroom and into the community. The life, the values, and the feeling of each school derive in large part from your commitment to your staff, to your students, and to the gospel.

### *Supervisory Officers*

You who are supervisory officers inspire and draw together from all segments of Catholic education a common vision and sense of mission for our schools. You are, as well, the stewards of highly complex institutions. The bureaucracies necessary to manage and give direction to these institutions take on a life and spirit of their own. We look to you to develop educational structures which will mediate a deep respect for every person whom our schools touch. The quality of life for both staff and students within our schools is perhaps your most significant challenge. The example you give of justice, charity, compassion, and consistency will set the overall tone and ethos of your systems.

### *Support Personnel*

You who are secretaries, building custodians, and other support personnel are an integral part of the Catholic educational effort. In the day-to-day life of a school you provide the services which are complementary to those engaged in teaching or administration. The spirit with which you carry out your service should be a Christian witness to all those who are in contact with you. What you do and how you do it may speak as much to the students about living the gospel as anything they will hear in the classroom. There is no such thing as "just a job" in a Catholic school. There are only various forms of Christian service, each calling for extraordinary dedication.

### *Trustees*

To you are entrusted the care of "hundreds of thousands of human lives with the capability, the possibility and finally the promise of achieving human greatness. And it is these small, fragile and ultimately marvellous lives that you as a trustee are called to serve." (*OSSTA Manual on the Catholic Trustee*).

In the long run, your service as trustees will be as effective as the extent to which you yourselves are willing to be continually educated in the faith. This will provide you with the depth and vision necessary to make of your role a noble political task. By working to create the necessary economic and social conditions, you make Catholic education possible.

In a time when many have grown cynical about those in public office, we are confident of the

integrity of our brothers and sisters who are trustees in their dealings with parents and trustees of other school systems. In a society in which relationships between employer and employee are frequently tense, we ask that you remember that teachers are more than employees and that you in turn are more than employers. Whatever role the various groups play in the Catholic educational community, you are all fundamentally co-workers for the sake of the kingdom. There are many conflicting demands which you are called to consider in your role as trustees. Not all these demands can be reconciled easily but they can be weighed with care, compassion and justice.

### *Leadership Selection*

In a country in which appointments are often made for political reasons alone, we ask you to make decisions about future leadership with a view to what will ultimately further the process of Catholic education. A number of significant decisions are fast approaching. Many directors of education, supervisory officers and principals will soon be retiring and it is you who must appoint their successors. We ask that you make these decisions prayerfully and with a profound grasp of the vision of Catholic education and of the justice which it demands.

### *Language Rights*

In a province in which linguistic rights are still not fully resolved, we ask French and English speaking trustees to face the choices for the future of Catholic education together. Catholic education allows for different models. The choices you make need not always be the same. We recognize the special responsibility of Catholic francophone trustees who seek to provide schools which will sustain the rich traditions of both their faith, and their culture and language. We hope that whatever decisions are made for the purpose of preserving linguistic rights will strongly reinforce the right to Catholic schools which is consistent with the Constitution and the traditions of Franco-Ontariens.

As French and English speaking Catholics in Ontario move into the future, we ask trustees to learn from our historical failures and to support the unique value of Catholic education in both official languages.

### *Priests*

We join with you, our brothers in the priesthood, in seeking new ways to meet the pastoral and spiritual needs of both staff and students in Catholic schools. Although the shortage of priests has made your relationship with the schools more difficult to sustain, the development of parish councils and other groups in the parish promise new ways of forming connections between the parish and school.

We encourage you to support with your co-operation and expertise the development of chaplaincy services and pastoral care departments in Catholic secondary schools. Because staff and students in these schools come from many different parishes, the pastoral care departments represent a new opportunity to integrate this ministry with the Church life present at the parish and diocesan levels.



At times you may be involved in the schools as chaplains and at other times you may be invited to support the religious and/or laity who are serving in that capacity.

In any case, your involvement in the faith development, social outreach and liturgical celebrations in a school will benefit both the parish and the school. Through your priestly ministry, the sacramental life of the Church can signify and make present the mysteries of faith which gather together and sustain a Catholic educational community. Our faith is not only something to be learned, it is also a mystery to be celebrated.

**Students, parents, teachers, principals, supervisory officers, support personnel, trustees, priests and bishops** — we each face our own challenges which are finally shared by all. These challenges will become blessings rather than burdens if we bear them with the hope and love which Jesus Christ has taught us. It should not surprise us when tension and difficulty beset us in this common task. Co-operation does not exclude disagreements and even honest conflicts of opinion. However, it does imply that we engage each other as Christians, as partners and not as adversaries.

To facilitate a co-operative response to these, and other specific challenges, the Institute for Catholic Education and the Conseil d'éducation Catholique pour les francophones de l'Ontario have been established. They are given direction by boards of directors with representatives from many of the Catholic education organizations of the province. It is our hope that they will assist in the working out of the practical forms of co-operation among the various partners in Catholic education. Such co-operation requires that each group grow in an understanding and appreciation of the challenges which face others involved in this task.

In the end, the promise of this moment for Catholic education in Ontario will be realized in the degree to which we recall to each other the promise of our Baptism. In some mysterious way, we have been promised to God and to one another. Our young Catholics are promises of God and we and they are called to share this promise with our world.

## *Discussion Questions*

1. The bishops have identified a number of challenges facing Catholic education. What would you add to the list?
2. What kind of faith commitment do you look for in teachers, trustees, and other educators in our schools?
3. What makes it difficult in our school system for parents to be involved in the schooling of their children?
4. Suggest new models for co-operation in our schools which would better involve parents in education.
5. What kind of reasons should prompt a person to run for the Catholic school board?
6. What kind of leadership do you expect priests and bishops to offer in Catholic education?
7. What needs should our adult education programs respond to?

PART THREE

## *The Social Fabric of Ontario*

Finally, we wish to speak on behalf of the Catholic community in Ontario to our fellow citizens in this province. Our commitment to contribute to the social fabric of Ontario has received added inspiration from your willingness to support the completion of the Catholic school system. There is no doubt that, in spite of misgiving and even opposition on the part of some, it has been the generous respect of the people of Ontario, for the concerns and rights of Catholic parents, which has made Catholic education more possible.

We have every reason to hope that the strengthening of the Catholic school system will enhance, rather than diminish, the quality of education in the public school system. Our expectation is that these two school systems will provide a stimulus and resource for each other in responding to the challenging task of educating all of the young people in Ontario.

Our students, in whatever schools they may attend, are the future. They deserve our best efforts at co-operating with each other in helping them to grow up into the challenging future which is theirs.

Our commitment to the best education for all students impels us to respect and support the wishes of parents in other faith communities for religious education in the public school system or for alternative schools which will reflect their values and beliefs. The primacy of parental rights in education is a value which should be realized not only by Catholic parents but also by others. We have publicly committed ourselves to support the concept of the development of alternative schools for people of other faith communities.

Let us join together in realizing the promise of this particular moment in the history of our province.