

This Moment of Promise

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

A DISTINCTIVE THREAD

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 lay men 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).

Woven in Faith Weaving In Hope

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 over-extension 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

The Texture of The Times

1. In the daily life of a school, how should Catholic schools be different?
2. Identify trends or values of 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?

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:

- 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

You are a most significant educational influence on each other.

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 searching 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

We encourage you to take your own faith development as seriously as you take that of your children..

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

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.

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 behavior, 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).

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 & 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

Not all these demands can be reconciled easily but they can be weighed with care, compassion and justice.

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.

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.

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. Cooperation 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.

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.

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.

Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario