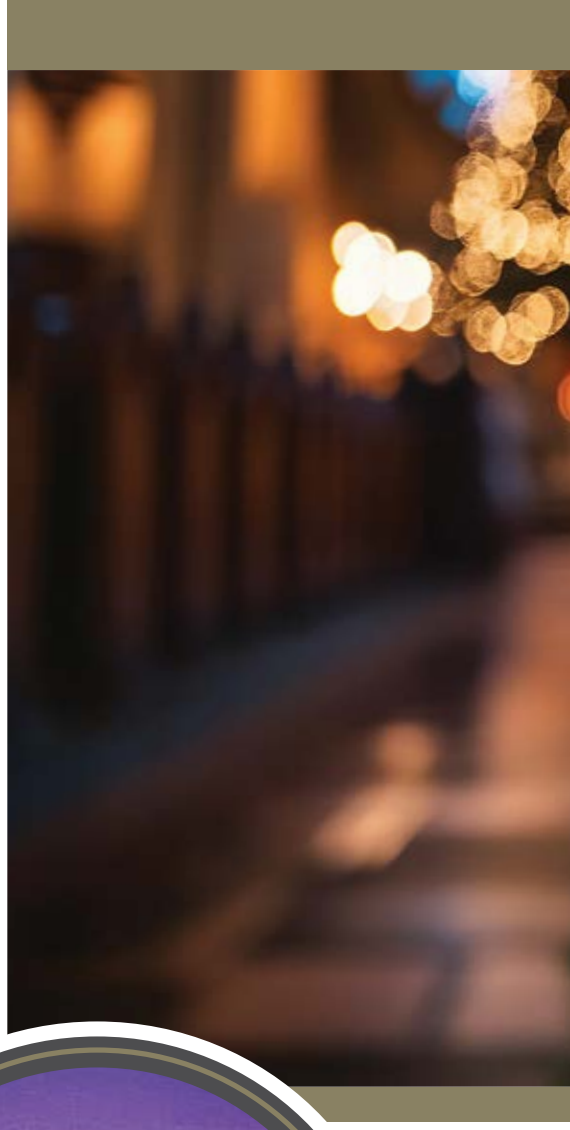
TOGETHER IN FAITH

Journey through Advent – Preparing the Way of the Lord

A collection of Catholic School Board practices

Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association



MISSION
STATEMENT

Inspired by the Gospel, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association provides the provincial voice, leadership and service for elected Catholic school trustees to promote and protect publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario.

VISION
STATEMENT

Ontario is enriched by a publicly funded Catholic education system governed by locally elected Catholic school trustees who serve with faith, commitment and compassion.

> The season of Advent, restores this horizon of hope, a hope which does not disappoint for it is founded on God's Word. A hope which does not disappoint, simply because the Lord never disappoints! He is faithful! He does not disappoint! Let us think about and feel this beauty."
> – Pope Francis, Angelus, 2013

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“This time of Advent is a time for hope. These great horizons of our Christian vocation, this unity of life built on the presence of God our Father, can and ought to be a daily reality. Ask our Lady, along with me, to make it come true. Try to imagine how she spent these months, waiting for her Son to be born. And our Lady, Holy Mary, will make of you alter Christus, ipse Christus: another Christ, Christ himself.” – St. Josemaría Escrivá

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world the Lord is come
Let earth receive her king
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and Heaven and nature sing
We will sing, sing, sing
Joy to the world
We will sing, sing, sing
Joy to the world the savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods rocks hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy
We will sing, sing, sing
Joy to the world
We will sing, sing, sing
He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders of His love
Joy to the world
We will sing, sing, sing
Joyful, joyful we adore Thee
God of glory, Lord of love
And hearts unfold like flowers before Thee
Opening to the sun above
Joyful, joyful we adore Thee
God of glory, Lord of love
And hearts unfold like flowers before Thee
Opening to the sun above

ADVENT PRAYER

The feast day of your birth resembles you, Lord
Because it brings joy to all humanity.
Old people and infants alike enjoy your day.
Your day is celebrated
from generation to generation.
Kings and emperors may pass away,
And the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse.
But your festival
will be remembered until the end of time.
Your day is a means and a pledge of peace.
At your birth heaven and earth were reconciled,
Since you came from heaven to earth on that day
You forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt.
You gave us so many gifts on the day of your birth:
A treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick;
Spiritual light for the blind;
The cup of salvation for the thirsty;
The bread of life for the hungry.
In the winter when trees are bare,
You give us the most succulent spiritual fruit.
In the frost when the earth is barren,
You bring new hope to our souls.
In December when seeds are hidden in the soil,
The staff of life springs forth from the virgin womb.
— St. Ephraim the Syrian

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT:

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

"Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem. May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man." – Pope Francis

INTRODUCTION

The journey through Advent in our Catholic schools is a time of exuberant joy. Our homes, parishes, schools and the Catholic community serve together, "not just living in anticipation of Christmas; we are also called to rekindle the anticipation of the glorious return of Christ, when he will return at the end of time, preparing ourselves, with consistent and courageous choices, for the final encounter with him. (Pope Francis, Angelus, Dec. 2018).

Around the world, Advent refers to a four-week season of reflecting on and celebrating the arrival of Jesus on Earth. It's a time to contemplate the unexpected nature of Jesus' humble birth and celebrate in joyful anticipation when he will come again to reunite Heaven and Earth once and for all. This resource is intended be a summary of promising Advent practices that are taking place across our 29 Catholic School Boards in the Province of Ontario. These practices all support the Call in Renewing the Promise for our children to encounter Jesus every day in our Catholic Schools.

It is hoped that in providing these shared promising practices, that Catholic schools and districts can work in partnership with parishes, families and the community to continue to collaborate with each other and celebrate faith and the life of Jesus Christ with our students and families throughout the Advent season and every day.

Journey through Advent: Preparing the Way of the Lord Promising Practices resource is organized into 4 sections:

- Home,
- School,
- Parish and
- Catholic Community.

> "The cooperation that exists between the home, parish, and school is an integral part of Catholic education. The school can play a significant role in facilitating a meaningful relationship between the parish and home. This is an important partnership because it helps parishes to connect with families, not only for sacramental preparation, but more importantly, for Sunday worship. Through the school, there are also other opportunities to draw parents and families into the life of the parish." – *Renewing the Promise,* pg. 9

“In Advent we await an event which occurs in history and at the same time transcends it. As it does every year, this event will take place on the night of the Lord’s Birth. The shepherds will hasten to the stable in Bethlehem; later the Magi will arrive from the East. Both the one and the other in a certain sense symbolize the entire human family. The exhortation that rings out in today’s liturgy: ‘Let us go joyfully to meet the Lord’ spreads to all countries, to all continents, among every people and nation.”
– Pope Saint John Paul II

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

MICHAEL BELLMORE

"The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord." "It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope." – Henri Nouwen

As an association representing Catholic Trustees throughout Ontario, OCSTA is committed to supporting Catholic school boards in promoting our Catholic identity and placing Christ and the teachings of the Catholic church at the centre of publicly funded Catholic education. As you know, the blessed season of Advent provides rich learning opportunities to enhance students' religious education knowledge and support them in their faith journey. These learning opportunities serve as grace filled moments to strengthen the essential partnership between the home – parish – school and the community.

We recognize that Ontario's 29 Catholic school boards have introduced many outstanding practices that place Christ and the teachings of the Catholic church at the centre of students' learning experiences during Advent. The purpose of this OCSTA Together in Faith: A Collection of School Board Practices is to focus on the Journey through Advent, with hope-filled Catholic teachings and traditions.

We recognize that Catholic School Boards in Ontario develop and deliver outstanding programs and services on the journey to Advent, preparing the way of the Lord. This year's *Together in Faith* hopes to capture, share and promote these promising practices and initiatives. It is our prayer that this summary resource offers the vision and experiences of each board in preparing for Advent. Together, we can celebrate and share these outstanding initiatives and support each other in our shared commitment to enable all students to realize their fullness of humanity.

In Faith and Service,
Michael Bellmore
President

JOY

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NICK MILANETTI

"At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern." – Mother Teresa, Love: A Fruit Always in Season

The season of Advent, as we embark on the 2025 Jubilee Year, *Pilgrims of Hope,* offers a wonderful opportunity to build renewed hope and discover new ways to foster the Kingdom of God each day in our schools. There is no doubt, the joy we experience throughout Advent is a spectacular rebirth of glory and celebration in our schools each year. I want to personally thank each of our Ontario Catholic District School Boards for submitting their promising practices centred on the Journey to Advent: Preparing the Way of the Lord.

The wonderful Nativity displays, Gospel readings, faith-based activities, Christmas carols, Advent concerts, and celebrations throughout our halls and classrooms highlight the spirit of joy, Christian service, and giving. Together with meaningful partnerships among home, parish and the wider community, these moments deepen our preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Pope Francis teaches us that, "Evangelizing is the Church's mission. It is not the mission of only a few, but it is mine, yours, and ours. We must all be evangelizers, especially with our life!" Each of us is called to be Advent leaders in our Catholic schools, our Catholic boards, and our Catholic churches: to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. It is through this shared commitment to the Lord, we deepen our own faith and strengthen our call to form each student in our care in the image of Jesus Christ.

Yours in Catholic Education,
Nick Milanetti
Executive Director

ADVENT FAMILY PRAYER

God of Love,
Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.
He is a sign of your love.
Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,
As we wait and prepare for his coming.
We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior.
– Author Unknown

> The season of Advent, restores this horizon of hope, a hope which does not disappoint for it is founded on God's Word. A hope which does not disappoint, simply because the Lord never disappoints! He is faithful! He does not disappoint! Let us think about and feel this beauty."
> — Pope Francis, Angelus, 1st December 2013

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel
O come, our Wisdom from on high,
Who ordered all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel
[instrumental break]
O come, O come, our Lord of might,
Who to your tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times gave holy law,
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel
Rejoice... Rejoice...
Rejoice... Rejoice...
Emmanuel...
Shall come to you, O Israel...
Shall come to you, O Israel!

FOREWORD

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT: PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

The Meaning of Advent in the Catholic Tradition

The weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas are a time of joyful anticipation in the liturgical year — it is a time of intense preparation. We exchange gifts, decorate our homes, organize get-togethers, plan acts of Christian Service, organize meals for family and friends in anticipation of Jesus Christ. Advent is a time of joyful anticipation, reflection and preparation in our spiritual lives as Christians.

The term Advent, from the Latin word "adventus," means "coming" or "arrival." The Advent season begins each year on the Fourth Sunday before Christmas and extends to December 24. The four Sundays of Advent acknowledge and symbolize the four thousand years attributed to the interval between the fall of Adam and the birth of Jesus Christ.

Many of us may think of Advent solely as a time to prepare spiritually to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus. But Advent is more than a prelude to Christmas. It is a season that calls us to reflect on humanity's connection to God throughout the ages—as it was, as it is now, and as it will be at the end of time. *Celebrating the Season of Advent,* published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2006, describes Advent's broader relevance:

> "Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year. While it expresses the deep longing of all humanity for God, it celebrates the three-fold coming of the Lord: remembering the events that surrounded the Lord's coming long ago, celebrating His coming among us today, and looking forward to His final coming in glory."

The Key Themes of Advent

Celebrating the Season of Advent describes Advent as a period of "devout and joyful expectation." Its four Sundays highlight our desire and longing for peace, justice, and unity. Once celebrated as a season of penance (known as St. Martin's Lent), Advent is characterized today by a sense of anticipation, longing, and incompleteness. In the Catholic tradition, Advent is observed as a period of quiet and moderation, inspired by anticipation rather than penance. It is a season that acknowledges our incompleteness and our yearning to be whole.

The key themes of Advent are reflected in the Gospels and other liturgical readings. Before the Second Vatican Council, the Church followed one yearly cycle of Bible readings. Following the Council, however, the Church adopted a three-year cycle to provide a more varied selection of readings. Each of the years A, B, and C is dedicated to a different Gospel: Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B), and Luke (Year C). The 2024-2025 liturgical year that begins with Advent follows Year C.

Symbols and Aspects of the Advent Season

Just as for the season of Lent, specific symbols and liturgical aspects have evolved to represent key spiritual dimensions of the season of Advent.

The Colour Violet as a Feature of the Liturgy: Violet is the liturgical colour for Advent. This is the same liturgical colour used for Lent, but its meaning in the context of Advent is different. As described in *Celebrating the Season of Advent,* "Rather than penance, the use of violet in Advent reflects longing and anticipation." In Canada, rose vestments may be used on the Third Sunday to reflect that Sunday's liturgical theme of rejoicing and joyful expectation.

Other Features of the Liturgy: *Celebrating the Season of Advent* notes that, during Advent, *"The Glory to God* is not sung and the organ and other musical instruments are used in moderation, not as a sign of penance, but to allow us to anticipate the full joy of the 25th." However, *"Alleluia* continues to be sung in the Gospel Acclamation and in other songs. This is the clearest indication that Advent is a season of expectation rather than of penance." In the week before Christmas, the *"O" Antiphons*—each begins with "O"—are sung as the verses for the Gospel Acclamation. Part of the Advent liturgy since the Middle Ages, "these verses reflect the cry of the Church in the last days of Advent: Come, Lord Jesus!"

The Advent Wreath: Lighting an Advent wreath is a tradition that originated in Germany in the 1500s. The wreath is often shaped from evergreen boughs, its unbroken circle a symbol of both eternity and God's never-ending love for us. The wreath has four candles, one for each Sunday of Advent. Three candles are violet. One is rose, to match the liturgical colour of the Third Sunday.

> The Advent wreath is usually blessed on the First Sunday. A blessing such as this one reflects the season's themes: "Lord God, your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Savior, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. Pour forth your blessings upon us as we light the candles of this wreath; may their light reflect the splendor of Christ, who is Lord, for ever and ever." (*Book of Blessings,* International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1989).

The Jesse Tree. The Jesse Tree has become a tangible way to narrate the story of God in the Old Testament and to connect it to the Advent season. Jesse was the father of King David. The tree's name is derived from the words of the prophet Isaiah: "A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of His roots." (Isaiah 11:1). The branch is regarded as a biblical sign of renewal and hope and is meant to represent the Messiah. Scriptural readings and symbolic ornaments added to the tree each day are connected to Biblical figures, prophesies, and events leading up to Christ's birth. The Jesse Tree relates the story of God's grace, human failure, and renewed hope in God across thousands of years of human history.

The Sundays of Advent and Their Scriptural Themes

Celebrating the Season of Advent tells us that each Sunday of Advent "takes on a particular character as suggested by the Gospel reading":

- The First Sunday focuses on the Lord's coming in glory at the end of time (known in the Greek New Testament as the Parousia).
- The Gospels of the Second and Third Sundays are devoted to John the Baptist and his message of reparation and repentance.
- The Gospel of the Fourth Sunday recounts scriptural events related to preparation for the Nativity of our Lord.

FOUR SUNDAYS
OF ADVENT

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Gospels of the First Sunday remind us that Advent is not just a season to prepare for the birth of the baby Jesus at Christmas. It is about how we must prepare ourselves for Christ's coming in glory at the end of time. It is not only during Advent, therefore, that we must be watchful and vigilant. As Matthew professes in his Gospel, no one knows precisely when that will be: "As the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man... Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:37-42)

> Before His Passion, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the need for vigilance and prayer in the face of tribulations at the end of time: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken...Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near...Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:25-28, 36)

Christ's message to us today is that, like the early Christians, we will experience events and circumstances that will challenge our faith and may lead to despair. But through prayer and knowing Jesus' continuing presence among us, we will endure as we witness and take comfort in God's works on Earth.

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Second Sunday of Advent continues the theme of preparing ourselves for Christ's coming in glory. Luke's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist, who preached repentance and reform to the people of Israel. Luke describes how the word of God came to John in the desert, and that John "went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3).

> Of John's work, Luke draws a direct connection to the prophet Isaiah, whose words spoke of "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" (Luke 4:4-6)

Advent invites us to prepare a way for the Lord by means of repentance and reform. Through the sacrament of baptism, we become disciples of Jesus and we are called to be messengers of God, inviting others to share in the salvation that awaits us when the Lord comes in glory at the end of time.

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The liturgy for this Sunday offers a distinct change in tone from the liturgies of the first two Sundays. The entrance antiphon from Paul's Letter to the Philippians calls us to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." (Philippians 4:4-5)

The Third Sunday is also called Gaudete Sunday. (Gaudete is a Latin word meaning rejoice.) Rose vestments are usually worn. Rose is also the colour of the candle on the Advent wreath that symbolizes this Sunday. The colour reminds us that Advent is a season of joy because our salvation is already at hand.

> Luke's Gospel for the Third Sunday continues to focus on the prophetic work of John the Baptist. John challenges the crowds who come to him to be baptized, calling on them to show evidence of their repentance as they wait for the Messiah. John's message is that repentance can be seen only through one's actions. Luke tells us that the people "were filled with expectation" as they asked whether John might be the Messiah. Affirming his role in the story of salvation, John answered, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:16)

John makes clear that the period of waiting for the Messiah is not a time of passivity. Rather, it is a time to prepare for His coming through acts of repentance. John's message resonates today as we, too, are called to prepare the way of the Lord with joyful anticipation.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Gospels of the final Sunday of Advent prepare us to witness Christ's birth as they describe events leading up to the Nativity. In Matthew's Gospel, an angel appears to Joseph directing him to take Mary as his wife. Luke's Gospel in Year B recounts the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce that she would give birth to Jesus. Luke's Gospel in Year C describes Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth who was with child as the mother of John the Baptist.

> Luke tells us that it was following the visit of the angel Gabriel that Mary set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth was filled with joy: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
> (Luke 1:41-42)

Elizabeth's joyful response to Mary's greeting acknowledges Mary to be the first disciple of Christ. As she continued to address Mary, Elizabeth celebrates Mary's faith in what God asks of her: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1:45). Through her response, Elizabeth acknowledges the role that she and Mary, along with their unborn children, would play in God's plan for salvation. Mary's role is critical. Because God chose her to give birth to Jesus, all of us can share in that salvation.

THE PROMINENT ROLE OF MARY

IN THE ADVENT SEASON

Mary is a strikingly central figure in the Gospels of the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Matthew's Gospel recounts the appearance of an angel to Joseph, directing him to take Mary as his wife and informing him that the child she will bear will be named Emmanuel. In Year B, Luke describes the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus.

In the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent in Year C, Luke (1:39-45) writes about Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Pope Francis tells us that this Gospel passage prepares us to experience Christmas properly. It communicates to us "the dynamism of faith and charity" that Mary showed as she hastened to the service of her elderly cousin who was with child. It is a dynamism "full of joy, as seen in the encounter between the two mothers, which is entirely a hymn of joyful exultation in the Lord." (Angelus, December 23, 2018)

Two important feasts that honour Mary during Advent highlight her prominent role in this liturgical season:

- December 8 is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. On this day, the Church celebrates the dogma that Mary was "in the very first moment of her conception…preserved free from all stain of original sin." (*Ineffabilis Deus,* Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception, 1854) Drawing a direct connection between Mary and the themes of Advent, Saint Pope John Paul II described Mary as the model of Christian expectation and hope, stating that "In her heart there is no shade of selfishness: she desires nothing for herself except God's glory and human salvation. For her, the very privilege of being preserved from original sin is not a reason to boast, but one for total service to her Son's redemptive mission." (Angelus, December 8, 1997)
- December 12 is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a feast that commemorates Mary's apparitions to an Indigenous peasant, Juan Diego, in Mexico in 1531. Revered in Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe is also honoured throughout the world. In Canada, the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council shares a prayer or reflection on December 12 to mark the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Our Lady of Guadalupe lends her name to a Catholic coalition of Indigenous Peoples, bishops, clergy, and lay organizations that is working to renew and foster relationships between the Church and Canada's Indigenous Peoples.

Advent provides an opportunity for us to reflect on Mary's unique role in God's plan for salvation. Celebrating the Season of Advent reminds us that Mary is the one "who gives herself to the service of the Word." Recognizing the work of God in her life, Mary believed that God's Word to her would be fulfilled. Her faith and openness to grace allowed God to work through her to bring the promise of salvation to everyone.

The Deeper Spiritual Significance of Advent

In the days leading up to December 31 each year, many of us make New Year's resolutions. We reflect on the year past, take stock of successes and failures, and commit to doing better. We strive to break bad habits and embrace more of what is good for us.

Positioned at the beginning of the liturgical year, the season of Advent invites us to reflect on and make resolutions about our spiritual life as we watch and wait expectantly for the Lord's coming. How do we live in a way that is worthy of the salvation that Christ's life and death earned for us? How do we glorify God in our daily thoughts, prayers, and deeds? Are we ready to embrace Jesus in our hearts as we commemorate His birth and await His return at the end of time?

Unlike Lent, Advent is not a penitential season. Nevertheless, a penitential aspect colours this time, as John the Baptist reminds us in his calls to prepare for the Messiah through acts of repentance. In his apostolic exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* (1984), Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that penance is "the inmost change of heart under the influence of the word of God and in the perspective of the kingdom." It means "changing one's life in harmony with the change of heart…It is one's whole existence that becomes penitential, that is to say, directed toward a continuous striving for what is better."

Pope Francis tells us that during Advent we are called "to rekindle the anticipation of the glorious return of Christ…preparing ourselves, with consistent and courageous choices, for the final encounter with him. We remember Christmas, we await the glorious return of Christ, and also our personal encounter: the day in which the Lord will call." (*Angelus,* December 23, 2018)

Throughout the liturgical year, and during the Season of Advent especially, as we strive to become better and do better, the ultimate question emerges: What am I doing to prepare the way of the Lord?

PRAYER FOR ADVENT

My little Lord Jesus, I love You and thank You for this Advent season. Please help me to understand all that You have done for me. Your loving mother held You in her heart and brought You into this world. Help me to do the same.

My loving Jesus, I choose You, this Advent, as my King and my God. Draw me close to You and help me to see my sins so that I can change the things that You want me to change.

Mother Mary, pray for me this Advent so that I may do all that God wants me to do. You said "Yes" to all that God asked of you. Please pray for me that I may do the same.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come, Lord Jesus, Come, Lord Jesus, come!

I love You, Jesus.

Amen.

(My Catholic Life)

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SILENT NIGHT

1. Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
'round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

2. Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!"

3. Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

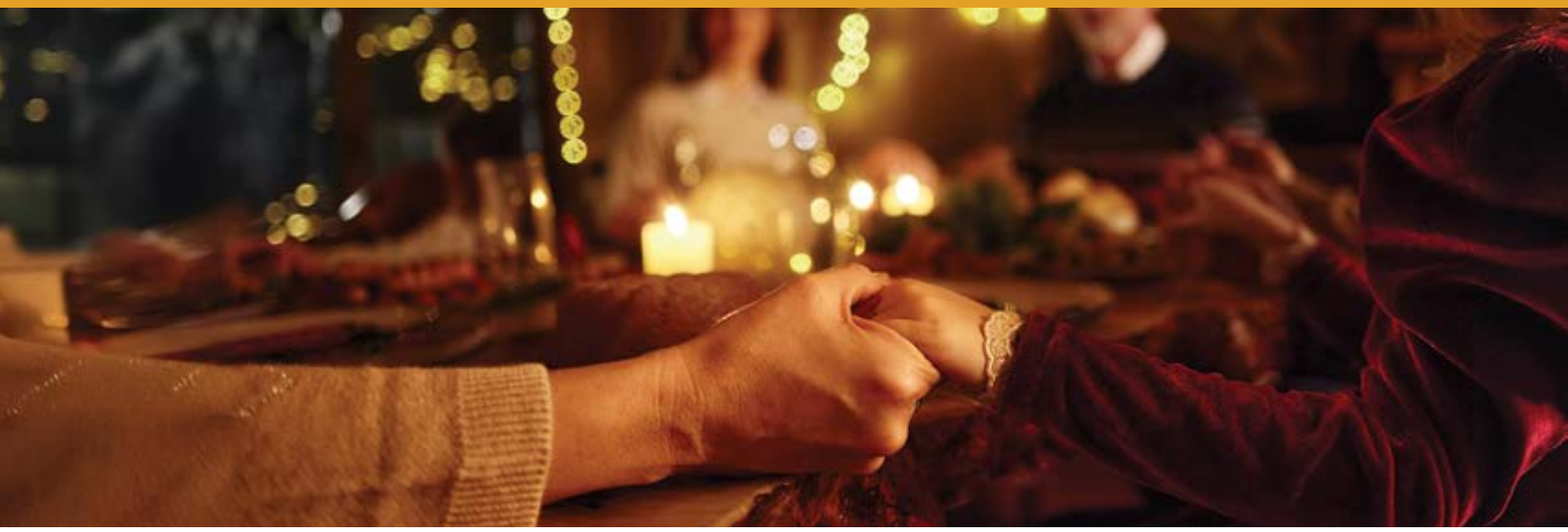
4. Silent night! Holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing
"Alleluia" to our King:
"Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born."

Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops indicate that while Advent expresses the deep longing of all humanity for God, it celebrates the three-fold coming of the Lord: remembering the events that surrounded the Lord's coming long ago, celebrating his coming among us today, and looking forward to his final coming in glory." — Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

ADVENT PROMISING PRACTICES

The following section of OCSTA's resource *Journey to Advent: Preparing the Way of the Lord* focuses on promising practices, in partnership with home, school, parish, and broader Catholic community, that were shared by our 29 boards to celebrate and honour this joyful time in our faith.

> Parents…Your parish community and your Catholic school are there to support you in caring for and nurturing your children. Work with the school community to help your child realize the gifts they have been given by our Creator God." – *Renewing the Promise,* pg. 16



JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT:

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE HOME

The joy of Advent is celebrated in our homes, with open dialogue, sharing resources and activities with the school, and mutually preparing the way for Christ' s birth. The home is the place where the love of Christ should be revealed and nurtured. The parent, as the first and foremost teacher of their child, has the primary role of loving and forming their child. Parents are also the ones who will initiate ways for their children to connect with their faith, through seeking out sacraments, participation in the parish, and the decision to attend Catholic Schools. Parents are role models for their children, and witnesses to their faith.

Below are promising practices from our 29 Catholic School boards serving in partnership with the home and families during the journey through Advent, as we prepare the way of the Lord.

- Home-School-Parish Advent Craft Night: Staff, students, parents, grandparents, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League gather for Mass and then complete a family Advent craft with music and refreshments.
- Advent Night: School organized an evening where we had a pasta dinner and talked about the meaning of Christmas. Each family made cards that were sent to a senior's home.
- Weekly Email: Using electronic media to reach all members of our Catholic community, sharing prayers for each week of Advent.
- Weekly Advent Liturgies: Families are invited to attend Advent liturgies at the school.
- Christmas Concert: Families are invited to celebrate the joy of Christmas at a special concert honouring the traditional Christmas carols, nativity and celebration of the birth of Jesus.
- Advent Evening Celebration: Our parishes and parent community celebrate a liturgy that involves the Catholic school council chair, our parish priest, staff at the school and student council. After the liturgy, we engage in an advent-themed activity that the families can bring home and enjoy by placing it on a tree or in their homes throughout Advent.

- **Twelve Days of Christmas Raffle:** This parent-led activity helps collect money in support of needy families in the community. It consists of raffle baskets (items donated by community) being raffled off each day leading up to the final day of school before Christmas.
- **Advent celebration with Parish:** Schools work with parish Priests, CWL and Parent councils. Families attend mass. Father hands each person a branch. Community follows Father to Church Hall to build a wreath together on a community table. After the blessing families enjoy refreshments and students have a craft to complete with their families.
- **Christmas Traditions Around God's World:** We celebrated our Christmas traditions by doing schoolwide activities centred the joy of Christmas, entitled our Christmas Traditions Around God's World.
- **Weekly Advent Prayers:** Christmas and Advent prayers shared with all families to encourage praying together during this time.
- **Christmas Miracle Campaign:** For our elementary associate schools, each class signs up to sponsor one or two students to support in Christmas giving.
- **Family Christmas Baskets:** Campaign for our families that is primarily funded by staff and outside community members to support needy families. Each family receives a basket of food or grocery gift cards as well as gifts for each member of the family.
- **Catholic Parent Involvement Committee:** Parents organize presentations for families on keeping Advent in the home by Religious Education consultant and System chaplaincy leader.
- **Food Drive:** Active support for the Good Shepherd Centre.

Family Christmas Baskets: Campaign for our families that is primarily funded by staff and outside community members to support needy families. Each family receives a basket of food or grocery gift cards as well as gifts for each member of the family.

- **Home Activity Bags:** Bags are sent home with students to do advent activities as a family to celebrate the coming of the Lord.
- **Advent Kits:** These special Christmas kits are sent home with kindergarten families to assemble together- to share in blessing and lighting candles.
- **Winter Clothing Drive:** Staff, students and families collect coats, mittens, hats, scarves to support families in need.
- **Hygiene Drive:** Families support the schools in seeking hygiene products for women's shelters.
- **Clothing Drive:** Compassion Society of Halton.
- **St. Boniface Christmas Trees**: A partnership inquiry activity. Students receive an inquiry-based introduction to the trinitarian God, St. Boniface, and the history of the Christmas tree as part of Christian celebration of Advent. In partnership with OYAP, elementary students (grades K-3), learn about the Girls in Trades program, as they receive two pre-packaged satchels of materials. Students are introduced to various tools used in carpentry and the safety protocols required. Following the lesson input, students build and decorate two ornaments to gift or keep and display during Advent — a wooden Christmas tree on a stand and a cross that can hang from a bough of a Christmas tree. In this way, through the pairing of the ornaments, students learn to connect the nativity of Christ with His saving death to connect the liturgical season with the story of God's saving love or history of salvation.
- **Christmas Concert:** Music Teacher and families coordinate a Christmas Concert focusing on the true meaning of Christmas.
- **Traditional Christmas Meal:** During Advent, parents lead the preparation of food for students celebrated in the gym, each December.
- **Present/Gift Drive:** Gift and food collection organized by parent council to support the needs of families, teaching students about the corporal works of mercy and preferential option of the poor.

St. Vincent DePaul Christmas Skate and School Turkey Dinner: Christmas concert at community centre with raffle donation to St. Vincent DePaul Christmas skate and school turkey dinner.

- **Ornaments in Movement:** A classroom inquiry activity with discussion and movement prompts. Students (grades 4-6, 10) engage in a diagnostic discussion about the significance and meaning behind the term Advent, images, candles, the wreath, and weeks of Advent with a particular focus on Gaudete Sunday and the Feast of St. Nicholas. This activity can be paired with a trades or OYAP program or done cross-panel having secondary Religion through the Arts students supporting elementary students. Two movement breaks — Santa Says and Movement Cubes aid in transitioning between activities. After the first movement break students experience a read-a-loud that analogizes the Incarnation and leads to a discussion about what it means to wait and prepare. Students then each receive a wooden medallion, string and paint markers. They are asked to depict on their wooden medallion either Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, corresponding with the weeks of Advent. The activity concludes with students working in pairs to build the movement cubes and the game follows.
- **Advent Activity Packages:** Provide Advent ideas for home, such as putting up a nativity, advent wreath, Saints to celebrate etc.
- **Active School Travel Challenge:** The Active School Travel Team and the Religious Education Department team up in December to invite students and families to participate in an Active School Travel Challenge through Advent. Using the Jesse Journey Tree, students reflected on a symbol of Advent as they journeyed to school. Students received a package containing Jesse Journey symbols, passages and prayers for each day of Advent. Each day, participating students read the passage and prayer, cut out their symbol at home, and carry it as they walk to school or their bus stop. Each symbol represents a story of "journey" in the Bible that relates to Advent. Each day students can stick or hang their symbol to a display tree in the foyer at school.
- **Faith Ambassador Mass and Dinner:** Hold an Advent Faith Ambassador Mass and Dinner for the ambassadors of the schools for their Faith service at one of our local parishes.
- **Digital Resources:** Encourage Families to use the resources in the family digital resources centre. This connects the home to what is being taught in the schools and the hope is that fruitful dialogue will begin between parents and children.
- **Advent Calendars:** Send home Advent Calendars with prayers and activities that can be done for each day of Advent.
- **Preferential Option for the Poor Food Drives**: Parents and families are included organizing and proclaiming the importance of food drives.
- **Christmas Carolling**: Staff and families sing the joyful Christmas carols in the school neighbourhood in the evening.
- **St. Vincent DePaul Christmas Skate and School Turkey Dinner:** Christmas concert at community centre with raffle donation to St. Vincent DePaul Christmas skate and school turkey dinner.
- **Family Advent Adventures:** Some of the younger classes have sent home a bag with Advent activities for the families to complete and share pictures for display.
- **Daily Readings:** Students are encouraged to follow along during the Advent season with daily readings.
- **Mind Up for Life:** Unplug for Faith Day, Faith and Wellbeing at home.
- **Parent (PIC) Mass:** Families invited to Mass organized by the PIC, with hot chocolate and carols after mass.
- **Winter Wonderland Evening:** A spectacular evening planed by parents and staff celebrating families. This family event involves ornament making and cookie decorating with families.

- Evening Advent Celebrations: In school or at parish families come together to share the joy of Christmas and the coming of the Lord.
- Communications: The Parent Involvement Communications plan has Advent specific communication with homes centred around various divisions, e.g. colouring, activities, readings, links, etc.
- Social Media: Sharing of projects on Facebook, newsletter, etc.
- Advent Calendars: Suggestions to families on creating their own family Advent calendars.
- Advent Workbooks: Family Advent workbooks are developed to share the real meaning of Christmas and the Advent journey.
- Advent Mass: Where the home, school and broader Catholic community come together to teach and celebrate the joy of Christmas and Advent.
- Sacrament of Reconciliation: Provide opportunities for reconciliation in the school and the parish for students to receive their sacrament.
- Advent Family Activities: Family centric events are prepared in each school for families by their parents in partnership with staff and parish.
- Christmas Windows: Families come together in the school to create joyful stain glass window art to place in their doorways and windows at home, celebrating the joy of the coming of Jesus.
- Advent Prayers for Families: Provide advent prayers for families to recite together and learn about the journey of Advent and the joy of Christmas.
- Social Media: Each week PIC and schools post on our social media a family learning activity that aligned with the learning and prayer in the schools.
- Sharing Parish Bulletins: Provide links to Parish Bulletin in Newsletters home.
- Advent Supper: Families organize a super for families to participate in to share the joy of Christmas with learning activities and Christmas music.
- Purple Gift Bags and Prayer Books: As Advent is a time of the year that prayer can be a gift that is shared, a bag, a prayer book and a letter went home to each family for two-three days, to encourage parents to pray with their young child. The bags and the books were returned to school to be sent home to another family.

Purple Gift Bags and Prayer Books: As Advent is a time of the year that prayer can be a gift that is shared, a bag, a prayer book and a letter went home to each family for two-three days, to encourage parents to pray with their young child. The bags and the books were returned to school to be sent home to another family.

- Advent Wreaths: Students engage in specially designed lessons and hands-on activities that are meant to be shared at home with members of their families such as creating Advent wreaths and calendars.
- Advent Bags: Teachers provide activities done in class celebrating the joy of Christmas to go home with children to be further celebrated in the home.
- Christmas Concert: Home and school come together to sing and celebrate Advent.
- Advent Wreaths: Create Advent Wreaths with reading buddies to take home.
- Be an Angel / Spirit of Giving Campaigns: Angel campaign supporting people in need in various ways.

> Catholic schools are places where the 'New Evangelization' can take root by inviting students and their families into a deeper relationship with Christ. The experience of community within the school can gently fan the embers until they burst into a flame of faith."
> (*Renewing the Promise*, pg. 8)

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT:

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT:

The school radiates the joy of Christ's coming throughout Advent. In *Renewing the Promise,* our Bishop's call us to Encourage Engagement and Instil Hope. We are reminded in the story of the Road to Emmaus, that the Disciples were given strength to share the good news and engage with their community. Schools ensure that our students are given daily opportunities to encounter Jesus and spread hope. The school provides the rich environment for children to make connections to their faith and to make faith accessible in everyday life, through opportunities to witness and to deepen faith. Our schools are places where we have the opportunity to witness, celebrate and proclaim the Good News and bring Christ to our students each day.

Below are promising practices from our 29 Catholic School boards and districts serving in partnership, during the journey through Advent, as we prepare the way of the Lord.

- Emphasis in Advent on Daily Prayer: Every day, the morning prayer is focused on preparation and anticipation of Jesus' birth. It is a reminder to the community that it's not just about Christmas. Rather it is a season of preparation. We pray, reflect, and prepare in our hearts a special place for the Messiah.
- Advent Wreath: Wreath with candles in the focal point of the school and each classrooms. Each class is outfitted with a two-sided liturgical cloth (green and purple).
- Christmas Decorations: Schools are decorated to coincide with the start of Advent, manger scene and lights streamed throughout the school.
- Weekly Advent Liturgies: Educating students on the significance of the Advent Wreath and celebrating liturgies around the lighting of each candle throughout the 4 weeks of Advent.
- Advent Books: Advent themed book titles from our Library and book fair are shared and available in the school.

- **The Twelve Days of Christmas:** Creating the Twelve Days of Christmas which involves a calendar that we share with parents, staff and students that invites families to have prayer and meditation as well as school-based events such as promoting Catholic Social Teachings such as the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable throughout the work we do during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Crafts and fun activities are also evident in this calendar.
- **Advent Christian Service:** Each day a new activity or initiative is done in the school (e.g., students write Christmas cards that are delivered to senior homes, collect food donations for the food bank, collect monetary donations for Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, etc.)
- **Adoration and Divine Mercy Chapel:** Staff and students gather together two days a week in the morning and pray the *Divine Mercy Chaplet* in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel.
- **Advent Journey:** Students complete something special every day during the Advent season for others.
- **Random Acts of Cheer Festive Cookies:** Indulge your sweet tooth and support our cause with our scrumptious Festive Cookies, available at an unbeatable 4 for a $1 during the first and last recess. Your taste buds are in for a treat, and your generosity will make this holiday season even more special. But there's more to savor — our Festive Cookie Bags, personally signed by the purchaser, will be randomly distributed to students throughout the school. Every bag is a sweet surprise, ensuring that every student feels the warmth of the season.
- **Advent Mass:** An opportunity to come together as a school community to celebrate the Eucharist and eagerly await in prayer for the Saviour's birth.
- **Reconciliation:** Priests from local parishes come to the school and offer the sacrament of Reconciliation for all Catholic students who wish to receive the sacrament. Non-Catholics are also invited to spend some time with the priest in conversation and receive a blessing if they wish. This includes a class-by-class Examination of Conscience leading up to Reconciliation.
- **Lunchtime Christian Meditation:** Invitation to all staff and students to take twenty minutes in meditation and contemplation; to create a sense of calm amid a busy Advent season.
- **Cookies with Santa:** Santa shares the birth story of Jesus with all students and then he has cookies and milk with them.
- **Religious Symbols:** Use of religious symbols in school to signify the beginning of the Liturgical season (e.g., banners in foyer, Advent wreath, Nativity Scene, school Advent calendars).
- **Opening Exercises:** On our Public Address System and/or TV announcements we light the candle of the Advent wreath every Monday morning live for the whole school to see.
- **Advent Videos:** Advent videos are available to play after the morning announcements daily. Each video is 3 to 4 minute long and provides some history regarding Advent traditions, symbols and Christmas Carols. Created by Ensign Media by Vision Video.
- **Advent Prayer Bags:** Prepared prayer bags are made available for each period 1 class, which contain a mini-Advent wreath, journey through Advent daily prayer book from Novalis, a Christmas prayer card, a cut out star.
- **Weekly Advent Wreath School Liturgies:** Weekly school liturgies using the gymnasium and classroom sacred spaces.

Reconciliation: Priests from local parishes come to the school and offer the sacrament of Reconciliation for all Catholic students who wish to receive the sacrament. Non-Catholics are also invited to spend some time with the priest in conversation and receive a blessing if they wish. This includes a class-by-class Examination of Conscience leading up to Reconciliation.

- **Chapel:** The school Chapel is changed to reflect the Advent season. Weekly morning mass is prepared throughout the Christmas season with accompanying daily prayers available.
- **Indigenous Support:** in collaboration with Indigenous Advisory Councils, organize a special family collection on the Six Nations Reserve for Christmas (e.g., food gift cards and gifts for children)

Kindergarten Religion Kit: This kit includes *A Savior is Born* book, Navitity pieces, magnets, and a series of lessons to help students reflect on and celebrate the journey through Advent. These lessons offered students the opportunity to learn about their faith through play, exploration and reflection guided by scripture and stories.

- **Ordas:** Ordas are given to all administrators at the beginning of Advent.
- **Liturgy of the Word Advent Opening:** Schools open the Advent season with a Beginning of Advent celebration for all grades.
- **Daily Prayers and Reflections:** Throughout the Advent Journey prayers and reflections are shared with the student, staff and families throughout the district.
- **Christian Advent Partnerships:** Connect with Society of Saint Vincent de Paul at the Parish-level to support families in the need through intentional Advent Christian charity events.
- **Advent Scripture Collections:** Classroom prayers and liturgies are offered in each lesson. Students learn about the meaning of Advent, the significance of the Advent wreath, preparing for Jesus' birth, as well as the Nativity story broken down into various learning invitations.
- **Staff Advent Twilight Retreat:** The Board Chaplain organizes an Advent Retreat for staff to attend to prepare for Advent.
- **School Faith Ambassador Weekly Staff Reflections:** These special reflection opportunities are developed by the Ambassador group with Board Chaplain to provide Advent adult faith formation before school throughout Advent.
- **Advent Information Evenings:** Information sessions are provided to share knowledge about Advent foods and traditions around the world
- **Share Point Site:** Advent resources for Faith Animators compiled and maintained by high school chaplaincy leaders on an easily accessible share point site.
- **Advent Adult Faith Formation:** Advent focused Adult Faith Formation sessions are planned for staff to spread the traditions and teachings of the Church and celebrate the Good News about the coming of the Lord.
- **Social Justice Initiatives:** Christian charity activities are organized by Youth Faith Ambassadors and Chaplaincy teams (food drives, clothing drives, Dr. Simone's CFFC).
- **Kindergarten Religion Kit:** This kit includes *A Savior is Born* book, Nativity pieces, magnets, and a series of lessons to help students reflect on and celebrate the journey through Advent. These lessons offered students the opportunity to learn about their faith through play, exploration and reflection guided by scripture and stories.
- **Advent Angel Campaign:** Schools and Board raise money for students that are in financial need, two weeks before Advent — for families to be blessed with Christmas giving (e.g., gift cards for food, clothing, necessities, etc.).
- **Catholic Teachings on Advent:** The Annunciation, The Birth of Jesus, The Shepherds and Angels and finally the visit of the Wise Men. Each lesson includes a scripture quote to anchor the learning and complement the big questions and kindergarten curriculum connections. Advent resources were sent out to each school and additional resources and liturgies were made available to staff via the Religious Education SharePoint site.
- **Christian Meditation:** An Advent Christian Meditation Faith Ambassador Wellness Event is planned to contemplate and reflect on the Advent message.

- Advent Faith and Wellness Choice Board: This choice board is provided for elementary students with links to activities for students in primary, junior and intermediate.
- Light of the World: Advent Wreaths are placed in all classrooms and prominent places. Weekly prayer services are held where the candle is lit and students learn about the significance of the specific candle and week.
- Nativity Plays: Christmas concerts and nativity plays are proclaimed and performed in schools across the board highlighting our faith and the birth of Jesus Christ.
- Advent Christian Charity: Food drives are held in our schools to collect canned goods for local food banks.
- Baby Shower for Jesus: Trustees and staff have a baby shower for Jesus' event where gifts for newborn babies are brought to the board including diapers, clothes, care necessities, etc.
- Toy Drives: School parents, staff, students, clergy, etc., provide toys and gifts to provide for families in need over the Christmas holiday. Schools sponsor these families in need and specifically purchase the items off their Christmas wish list, as well as provide all the groceries needed for a Christmas lunch/dinner and breakfast.
- Music Ministry: Singing as a Catholic community for Children's Christmas Eve Mass.
- Teen-Angel: Some of our high schools participate in 'Teen Angel,' where students bring in Gift Cards which are then donated to students in their school or local community who are in need.
- Winter Coat Drives: Commensurate with our works of mercy, we collect warm winter coats which are donated to our board Adult learning centre for newcomers to Canada and to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Nativity Plays: Christmas concerts and nativity plays are proclaimed and performed in schools across the board highlighting our faith and the birth of Jesus Christ.

- History of the Advent Wreath: Board Wide Advent Faith Formation opportunities on the history of the Advent Wreath is celebrated. Participants make a fresh wreath, and the Holy Family in a wooden nativity set. Virtual Faith formation modules where staff could complete these activities on their own or as a school staff are created.
- Christmas Card Making: Cards are sent to retirement homes to share the joy of Advent.
- Christmas Door Decorating: Deck the halls to bring the joy of Advent and Christmas throughout the halls of the schools.
- High School Bands and Musicals: Invitation of associate elementary schools into the local high school to listen to the High School bands and sing Christmas carols with them or high school visits the elementary school as a traveling road show to showcase music programs and sing Christmas carols.
- Non-Uniform Days: Out of uniform days to collect money to support local Community Care organizations.
- Guest Speakers: Invitation of Guest speakers such as our local order of Sisters and parish Priests to talk about Advent and God's great love for us.
- Hat and Mitten Trees: Schools collect hats, scarves, mittens that are then donated to local shelters or students in need at the schools.
- Community Christmas Parades: When participating in local Santa Claus parades, schools also collect food, hats, and mittens or something that is needed along the route which is then donated.
- Jesse Tree: In classrooms or front foyer of the school, each day an ornament is added, and a reading is done over the announcements so that all students can learn about the Jesse Tree.
- Advent Social Media: An increase in social media posts bringing awareness to the Christmas season, its meaning and the Catholic traditions and teachings of the Church at this time.

- Chaplaincy Visits to Elementary Schools: Visits to lead retreats and activities focused on Advent in their associated schools highlighting the meaning of Advent.
- Morning Announcements: Using the public address system in the opening exercises to focus on the Liturgical Season and the joy of Christmas.
- Learning Management System: Classroom teachers use the LMS to make announcements and links about the special days of Advent and the important readings in our Faith.
- Prayer Centre: Each classroom has Advent prayers in various languages of the students celebrating Advent and our faith.
- Advent prayer Services and Masses: In the Churches, gymnasiums, classrooms and board room we celebrate.
- Keep Christ in Christmas Poster Contest: Support the Knights of Columbus in promoting and celebrating this Advent contest.
- Advent Outreach Turkey Dinner: Advent Dinner is prepared by families for those who need in school communities, providing nutrition in keeping with our corporeal works of mercy.
- Mittens and Hats Drive: Collections of these items for our Students' Christmas packages.
- Warm Clothing/Coats/Toiletries Drive: This Continuing Education Charity Drive is organized for students who are struggling with homelessness.
- Be An Angel Campaign: Staff and students collecting non-perishables for families in need.
- Christmas Luncheon: Parents/guardians invited to help support school prepare a Christmas lunch for entire school creating meaningful memories about this special time in our faith. Lots of music, celebration and Christmas readings.
- Unplug for Faith Day: Focused time thinking and learning about Advent.
- School Advent Spirit Days: Linked to the season (dress up or do) — created by intermediate leadership team.
- Adopted a Family: Through the local Women's Shelter we adopt families in need to make Christmas wonderful for the family.
- Family Christmas Caroling Night: All invited to participate in the joy of the Christmas carols.
- Christmas Cards: In keeping with our works of mercy, students made cards for the local senior's home to spread the joy of Christmas.
- Advent Angel Fundraiser: People could purchase an angel for the school foyer Christmas tree with donations going to the Dominican Republic Experience.

Religious and Family Life Education Advent Newsletter: Ongoing communication newsletter is provided with access to digital Advent resources for families to access to share Advent activities, readings and learnings.

- Wellness Prayer Cards: Students create prayer cards with tips for celebrating Advent.
- Faith and Wellbeing in the Classroom: Highlighting this special Advent Season to intentionally focus on the Catholic teachings, traditions and contemplation.
- Sacrament of Reconciliation: In the schools for families and students.
- Christian Mediation: Common time provided throughout Advent to meditate on the journey to the birth of Jesus and His impact.
- Kindergarten Nativity Story Video: Available to homes, schools and parishes.
- Joy-Full Socks Campaign: Collect new socks for the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre.
- Advent Wreath Blessing: In each school and classroom, a blessing is done by local priest, senior staff, or trustees in each school serving in joyful partnership.
- Nativity Project, Nativity Kits: Students assemble and decorate mini nativity kits to share with their families.
- Dress Up As A Saint Day: Celebrating Advent with focus on the lives of Saints who have lived a Beatitude life.
- Advent Kindness Bulletin Boards: Celebration of Advent honouring works on kindness as a witness to Jesus' life.

- Religious and Family Life Education Advent Newsletter: Ongoing communication newsletter is provided with access to digital Advent resources for families to access to share Advent activities, readings and learnings.
- School Wide Liturgies and Prayer Services: Celebrations centred around the teachings of the church, the meaning of the Advent wreath, in addition to other Advent symbols and traditions, and the history of Advent.
- Choir Trip to Seniors' Homes: singing to the elderly bringing the joy of Christmas.
- Christmas Concert Musical 'The Loaned Manger': developed and shared during the Advent season.
- Advent Displays: Various advent wreaths and nativity scenes in central locations in Catholic Education buildings and schools.
- Religion Classes: Specific focus on the teachings of the Church and Advent.
- Advent Singing: Choirs, caroling and singing Advent hymns in the classrooms and halls of the schools.
- Daily Challenges to Action: Christian service actions in our schools and classrooms.
- Advent Word Among Us Books: Provided for school staff to share the teachings of Advent.
- Schoolwide Journey to Bethlehem: Activities organized for whole schools celebrating the journey to advent.
- Year-Round Friday Dress Down Days: Staff dress down, with the donations going towards the Christmas hampers for students and their families in need.
- Advent Staff Gathering: Across system for Wednesday morning virtual prayer service staff across the system celebrate the joy of Advent.

Nativity Scene/Creche: Decorate and celebrate the nativity scene in foyer and in classrooms.

- Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Toiletry Drives: Campaign to support needy families in our schools.
- Decorating Fun: As in our homes, Advent Wreaths on Prayer Tables and in Foyer adorn the school.
- Advent Curriculum: Focus on teachings of Advent and teachings of the Catholic church during Advent time.
- Nativity Scene/Crèche: Decorate and celebrate the nativity scene in foyer and in classrooms.
- Knights of Columbus 'Keep Christ in Christmas' Art Contest: Support local churches with this art contest keeping Christ in Christmas.
- School Partnerships: partnering with the Catholic community on Advent. Themes of giving such as Angel Trees, Christmas Hampers with various local Parishes.
- Quiet Week: The week before Christmas-faith based learning and living activities only.
- Prayer: Exploring a variety of forms during this Advent.
- Christmas Cards for Veterans: special cards of thanksgiving to veterans at this time of joy from our students.
- Advent Calendars: Focused on Acts of Kindness.
- Classroom Prayer Tables: The centre of prayers in the classrooms radiate the Advent Joy theme.
- School Board Themes: Board provides (written in-house) learning activities and prayer services that align, often connected with Christian service components in each school and sometimes partnering with mental health. Examples: Nurturing Hope: Infecting the World with Compassion, Year of St. Joseph, Hope and Light.
- Adventure Through Advent: Kindergarten classes are provided with specific activities for the school days of Advent focused on the advent traditions of the Church and the feast days that fall on these days.
- Staff Advent Retreats: Retreats, usually after school for 90-minutes, focus on Advent themes and give staff time for prayer and reflection. Many times, the group gathered would share food afterward as a potluck meal or go to a restaurant. Advent resources are shared. The resources can be left in the staff room, work rooms, or in the chapel.

> Clergy and Pastoral Teams…Catholic schools present a tremendous opportunity for the new evangelization and can be a powerful tool in helping you to connect with students and families." (*Renewing the Promise*, pg. 21)

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT:

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PARISH

Renewing the Promise **reminds us that we are all Joyful Disciples. Throughout Advent, we find Joy in the Gospel and come together to celebrate our faith. Just as the Disciples were excited to share their joy in encountering Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, as partners we to can share the joys that come with encountering Jesus and celebrating together in faith. To do so, we need to create opportunities to gather the community together to celebrate our faith and to create opportunities for our students to develop spiritual practices and provide opportunities for contemplation as ways to encounter Jesus in their daily lives. The Parish provides opportunities for children to grow in their faith life in both a sacramental way and a spiritual way. The parish builds upon and extends the work of both home and school in the development of faith.**

Below are promising practices from our 29 Catholic School boards serving in partnership with the parish during the journey through Advent, as we prepare the way of the Lord.

- Advent Craft Night: Families gather for craft night at the Church Hall focused on Advent Activities.
- Family Advent Community Mass: opportunity for families to celebrate the Eucharist together.
- Weekly Advent Masses at the Church: for families of the associated schools.
- Family Advent Night: School, Parish and Home evening gathering for prayer, liturgy, friendship, community and craft building.
- Welcome Celebration: Priest and families to participate in liturgy followed by musical performance by Kindergarten and Primary classrooms.
- Advent Blessings: Father comes to give blessings during Advent season in classrooms.
- Church Celebrations Together: Family Advent Night; First Reconciliation; Cathedral Christmas Charity; Parish Christmas Bazaar; First Communion sacrament, and interviews for Grade 2 families.

- **Parish Council Lunch:** Student Christmas Luncheon put on by the Catholic Parent Council with Parish Council. Parish priest is invited to the celebration.
- **Youth Group Activities and Christmas Party:** Celebration for students in grade 7 and 8.
- **Breakfast with Santa:** Opportunity to build on the joy of Christmas having a celebration of breakfast with St. Nicholas.
- **Ladies Social and Cookie Exchange:** An evening of prayer followed by a social and optional cookie exchange.
- **Parent Advent Mass:** Priest led liturgy at school for parents followed by Christmas concert from FDK and Primary students.
- **Clothing Drive:** Christian charity for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in conjunction with the parish bringing new or gently used clothes.
- **Parish School Advent Communication Network:** Work closely with the youth ministers of our local parishes to promote the events and opportunities open to our school's youth. This strong connection acts as a bridge between school and parish. By maintaining communication and a very friendly relationship, the students naturally gravitate to and are eager to participate in, these activities that strengthen their faith.
- **School Chapel Liturgies:** Parish priest is invited to participate in our weekly Advent liturgies.
- **Parish Activities:** School connects and communicates parish programs, strategies, projects, campaigns, activities, with parish with families.
- **Reconciliation:** Schools shares with staff and students, the parish Advent reconciliation opportunities.
- **Parish Mass Schedule:** The school shares the Christmas Mass Schedule through announcements and website.
- **Solidarity with Society of Saint Vincent de Paul:** Serve together with Society of Saint Vincent de Paul on their Christmas Campaign.
- **Advent in the Church:** Father promotes and invites students to parish activities during his school visits.
- **Prayer:** Different types of prayer services are offered — Taize, adoration, etc.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Parish welcomes schools to come and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or offers the Sacrament in the schools.
- **Nativity Focus:** Reenacting of the nativity during Mass.
- **Christmas Caroling:** Youth and Family Ministries share the joy of music ministry through singing Christmas carols, inviting the local elementary schools to join them in the caroling.
- **UCCares:** United Alliance extra-curricular groups, along with religion classes collect for ROCK missions, food drives, and other community partners.

Parish School Advent Communication Network: Work closely with the youth ministers of our local parishes to promote the events and opportunities open to our school's youth. This strong connection acts as a bridge between school and parish. By maintaining communication and a very friendly relationship, the students naturally gravitate to and are eager to participate in, these activities that strengthen their faith.

- **Student Led Advent Liturgy:** Student council organizes liturgies for peers or elementary schools.
- **Friday Morning Mass:** Staff is invited to attend first Friday Morning Mass at the church in collaboration with their parishes.
- **Adult Faith Formation:** Create a speaker's series with keynote Dr. Michael Hyrniuk — The Hope of Advent: What are we waiting for?
- **The Gift Drive:** Supporting the Church in the Gift-Drive through the parish.
- **Knights of Columbus Advent Family Gathering:** Share the communication regarding the parish Knights of Columbus Advent activities.
- **Our Christmas Concert:** The Christmas concert take place at the church creating a welcoming environment.

December Community Friendship Meal: Food and Nutrition class -prepares the December Community Friendship Meal served in the Parish Hall -Walk around tour inside of the Church to highlight items of significance in Advent.

- Nativity Project: Annual Nativity Exhibition hosted at a local parish displaying 200+ nativity kits of a parishioner, in partnership with the Knights of Columbus.
- Advent Liturgies and Masses: Celebrated and promoted at Churches with student lectors and servers.
- Clergy Visits: Class and school visits by Priests and clergy during this holy time.
- December Community Friendship Meal: Food and Nutrition class -prepares the December Community Friendship Meal served in the Parish Hall -Walk around tour inside of the Church to highlight items of significance in Advent.
- Weekly Mass at Parishes: Organize Holy Mass for families of various schools.
- Family of Schools Mass: Organize masses for the Family of Schools belonging to the parish welcoming families.
- Rosary Prayer Program: The church specifically invites families from their associate schools to pray the rosary together, and principals communicate about this shared opportunity often.
- Parish Partnerships: Family of School Parishes work with their local school to collect items to support members of their community in need. This usually involves the collection winter items for needy families and new Canadians.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Loving Father,
Help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.
Close the door of hate
and open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.
Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.
May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven,
for Jesus' sake.
Amen.
– Robert Louis Stevenson

> Catholic schools are communities of accompaniment where the story of our salvation is known and shared, offering the encouragement that comes from knowing Jesus walks with us." (*Renewing the Promise*, pg. 7)

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT:

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

During Advent, we are particularly reminded of *Renewing the Promise*, and the importance of Accompaniment and Building Relationships. While walking together, Jesus was able to share the story of our faith with the disciples. Pope Francis talks about the art of accompaniment and says it is about "spending time walking alongside one another to listen, and to teach and in so doing, transform." (*RTP,* pg. 6) As partners with our community, communicating the goal of sharing our faith with our children, accompanying each other and developing relationships is integral to our common mission. Our journey to Advent partnership works best when we create opportunities to promote communication and dialogue between the home, parish, school and Catholic community. It is important to find ways to bridge connections between staff and students in the school with the parish and the parent community.

Below are promising practices from our 29 Catholic School boards serving, in partnership with the community during the journey through Advent, as we prepare the way of the Lord.

- Snowsuit Collection: Working in partnership to provide outdoor clothing for needy schools.
- Christmas Baskets: Classroom families get together to organize Advent baskets for those in need in response to our Catholic social teachings.
- Food Drive: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Good Shepherd Food Bank.
- Christmas Card Campaign: Organized Advent with Senior Homes.
- Volunteers: Student groups volunteer at the DeMazenod Door (local food shelter).
- Choir Visits: School choir visit Seniors Homes and performs Christmas music.
- Clothing Drive: Donations to support of local charities.
- Adopt a Family Campaign: An annual campaign where we adopt families (anonymously; classes do not know who they are adopting) and help to provide a meaningful Christmas with grocery gift cards and gift cards to stores they enjoy.

Community Christmas Concerts: High school choirs participate in community Advent concerts to support local charities.

- Reverse Advent Calendar: Each class collects items for the agency of choice. Kindergartens collected hats and gloves, Grade 1s collected toiletries, Grade 2s collected food items, and so on.
- Advent Joy of Giving Food Drive: serve with community to support homeless in the community.
- Toy Drives: Held in most of our schools to help provide toys and gifts to families in need over the Christmas holiday.
- Visit Neighborhood Nursing Homes: Gather to sing Carols and have treats together
- Toy Drive: Gift cards, toys, presents were donated and collected for hospitals.
- Helping Others in Times of Need: Donations by families to help those families in our community who are struggling by purchased gift cards for groceries and clothing.
- Give The Gift of Joy: In collaboration with the Catholic Children's Aid Society, accepting donations through the Give the Gift of Joy Campaign from our school communities. You have the chance to support (e.g., helping youth to lead independent lives through education and stable housing, supporting families with the essentials needed for children in their care, addressing food insecurity to support families we serve).
- School Wide Donation Campaign: In collaboration with a local second-hand store, items collected throughout community to be used in raffle baskets.
- Partnerships: School and local businesses work together to help raise money for th needy in community.
- Knights of Columbus Food Drive: Work together to purchase Gift Card Donations for Families in need/Equal Opportunity school support, Toy Drive, Clothing Donations.
- Hygiene Supplies Drive: Through our hygiene supplies drive, we are able to assist our local food bank help members who are struggling with the high cost of living.
- Our Christmas Miracle Program: Collected Christmas gifts for those in need in our community.
- Winter Clothing Drive: To support local families, homeless and food banks.
- 'Out of the Cold' Campaign: Collecting winter accessories for those in need during the cold winter months i.e. gloves, mitts, hats, Good Shepherd Food drive.
- Give the Gift of Joy Campaign: Families donated Christmas gift cards for: Catholic Children's Aid Society, families in need in our school community; families in need in our feeder Parish.
- Community Christmas Concerts: High school choirs participate in community Advent concerts to support local charities.
- Christmas Parade: Advent theme floats in local Santa Claus parades. Also, school board banner is displayed in local Santa Claus parades
- Mitten Drive and Sock Drive: Families help to support shelters and the Salvation Army.
- Positive Saints: Schools and parent councils support Food Bank Non-Perishable Food Collections and donate of hot food items for Christmas Dinner.
- High-School Student Community Service: Students are encouraged to collect food in their local community food drives. Students walk the collection routes or assist at the drop-off depot and help organizing food and filling the shipping containers.
- Harvest Kitchen: Held once a week in the community to feed those in need. The meal is cooked by our local high school staff and students, set up and served, and then help to clean up in the evening.
- Sewed Gift Bags and Hot/Cold Rice Bags: Students work together to create these bags, and the money raised all went towards the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.
- Speaker Series: Identify speaker in the Catholic community for Advent time of reflection.

- **Indigenous Family Assistance:** Organized by school and board with support of the Advisory Committee to distribute gifts and food to needy families.
- **Storybooks:** Books are collected for admission into school Christmas concert; and book donations are then sent to community group for needy families.
- **Advent Turkey Dinner:** Dinner date is chosen in conjunction with the other organizations that feed the hungry, but it is all prepared and served in house. Leftovers go to local soup kitchens/Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
- **Knights of Columbus - Reason for the Season Poster Contest:** Schools promote and distribute information about this Advent opportunity with the church.
- **Joyful Socks Campaign:** This socks campaign is organized for the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre.
- **Deliver Meals:** Principal and staff help deliver meals to families in need.
- **Christmas Caroling:** Singing at local retirement home and letters to seniors.
- **Christmas Sharing Baskets:** Students collect items for families in need.
- **Food Drives:** Supporting community food drives with goods and services.
- **Community Organizations:** Reaching out to schools directly to help school families in need.
- **Matthew 25 Program:** This program supports families in need in various ways at Christmas time.
- **Community Craft Fair:** Hosting of community Christmas Craft Fair in highschool gymnasiums.
- **Advent Art Displays:** Christmas student art displayed at local post office and around community.
- **Advent Food Drives:** Campaigns such as toy drives, Giving Advent Calendars, and Angel Tree campaigns.
- **Shoe Box Campaign:** Boxes filled with personal necessities for those in need.
- **Operation Snowsuit:** Support of Operation Snowsuit through the local Community Poverty Action Network (CPAN).
- **Student Leadership Groups:** At local masses for all schools, student leadership groups help organizations and develop of Gift Basket Program.
- **Advent Catholic Community Retreats/Liturgies:** These are led by Ambassadors, Chaplains and led by students.
- **Catholic Gatherings:** Schools support community events supporting our Faith.
- **Community Religion SharePoint Resources:** Prayers, videos, liturgies, etc., are online to share with community.
- **Community Service Hours:** Opportunities for Catholic Community Service hours, organized by the Community Organizations in their Christmas giving campaigns.

Indigenous Family assistance: Organized by school and board with support of the Advisory Committee to distribute gifts and food to needy families.

- **Pregnancy Support Resource Centre:** Support of the local pregnancy support resource center with gifts for moms and babies.
- **Adult Faith Formation Program:** Invite Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Development and Peace in to speak to the school community.
- **Christmas Mitten Tree and Coats for Kids Program:** Support the local drive in the community with student help and offerings.
- **Advent Resources:** Provided system-wide/Board-wide Adult Faith for All.
- **Social Justice focus on Catholic Charities:** Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Development and Peace (food and toiletry drives; hats and mitts).
- **Knights of Columbus 'Keep Christ in Christmas' Campaign:** school supports this local parish Advent activity.
- **Community Partnerships:** Partner with the Shepherds of Good Hope, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and/or other organizations that help support community members in need during Advent (and all year).

Food Sorting: Classes attended Society of Saint Vincent de Paul where they sort food from the food drive which was organized by our Catholic High School Council.

- Joy-full Socks: Schools participate by creating care packages for individuals who can use personal hygiene items and winter accessories. Families and classes gather the items, stuff the socks and prepare the packages. It is a way to show our love locally.
- Food Sorting: Classes attended Society of Saint Vincent de Paul where they sort food from the food drive which was organized by our Catholic High School Council.
- Radio Ads: Communication adds are created based on the theme of Christmas and the Catholic Education Week themes to help the community to understand that Catholic schools celebrate special themes every year which culminate in CEW in May. These ads are shared during the Twelve Days of Christmas.

"Rejoice and be glad that so great and good a Lord, on coming into the Virgin's womb, willed to appear despised, needy, and poor in this world, so that men who were in dire poverty and suffering great need of heavenly food might be made rich in him." – St. Clare of Assisi

IDEAS FOR ADVENT

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"At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern. – Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta

JUBILEE PRAYER

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.
May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.
Amen.
– Pope Francis

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