



WE DISCERN OUR FUTURE

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In 1989 the Bishops of Ontario entrusted the future of Catholic education to the laity. Their pastoral letter, *This Moment of Promise*, is available on our web page and is a key document to know and understand given the last twenty years of Catholic education in Ontario.

We have reached a time in our own progress as a school system where – flowing from the Bishops' letter – it is incumbent upon us to discern our future. It is our System beliefs in *Sharing Our Journey*, that will guide the discernment process we are about to engage in toward a compelling vision for all learners.

- We celebrate a rich and fruitful tradition of 171 years of Catholic education in Waterloo Region;
- We are once again being questioned about our relevance for today's society;
- We have seven graduate expectations for our students that call us to be faithful to our mission; expectations that are directly aligned to the mandate from the current government to implement *Character Education* in all that we say and do;
- We are in the beginning stages of implementing our *Professional Standard of Ethics* that call us to reflect on who we are and how we are seen both from the inside and within the broader community.
- We consistently exceed the provincial norm in the testing process being one of the top 20 English-language boards in the province;
- We are one of the leading boards in the province – the fifth largest provider (and growing) of Adult and Continuing Education experiences. This is demonstration of our dedication to life long learning for all.
- We have made strides in reaching out to provide learning experiences for all students. We have new roads to walk as we systematically review our approach to safe school and specialized education. We are called through our baptism to be signs of hope and harbours of inclusion.

*Ontario Catholic
School Graduate
Expectations*

1. A discerning believer formed in the Catholic Faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mystery of God's presence through word, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living.

- We are called to respond to the recent findings of the 2006 provincial symposium on Catholic Education; results that are captured in the document *Our Catholic Schools* that is posted on our web page;
- As Archbishop Philip Pocock reminded us in his 1972 statement – relevant then as it is today - we are called to proclaim who we are – a Catholic school one in which our living faith is “*integrated into the entire syllabus, curriculum and life of the school.*”
- We are also often reminded that it is our task to create and shape our future not relive our past. This was captured by Archbishop Oscar Romero when he stated:

“It helps now and then to step back and take a long view...We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they will give the future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development...We may never see the end results... We are prophets of a future not our own.”

2. An effective

communicator who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively, responding critically in light of gospel values.

Last year school administrators received a *killick* as a symbol for their leadership. The *killick* is native to Newfoundland. It is an anchor made from the largest rock found in a field. The rock is surrounded by a wooden frame and tied together by strands of rope. For the Newfoundlander – and I am a proud Newfoundlander – the *killick* is used to moor nets and small boats. At the same time, it represents our centre; our beliefs that provide a haven for reflection in turbulent times.

The metaphor of the *killick* helps us to centre ourselves during times of storm/crises. When we share leadership and join together with others our tasks become easier, our ability to respond strengthened and profound.

3. A reflective, creative and holistic thinker

who solves problems and makes responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good.

We do live in what some call interesting times. For me, Catholic education will always be under scrutiny. If we were not trying to live our vocation, it would not be interesting times.

I have, however, come to the realization that I am going to stop using certain comparisons and language and begin using other ways to describe who we are; to challenge myself and ourselves to think and act differently.

First, I am going to stop comparing ourselves to other school systems. I went to a Catholic elementary school and a public secondary school. I began my teaching career in the public school system and began my leadership roles within the Catholic school system. I value and applaud the public school system but I cannot compare myself or the Catholic school system to the public school system because each system has a different mandate; a different ethos; a different purpose. Rather than trying to compare oneself to a system that has a fundamentally different mandate, the essential question for a Catholic school system is:

“How true are we to the Gospel values that we proclaim?”

Msgr. Dennis Murphy in his recent book, *Catholic Education: A Light of Truth*, writes that

“...there are many distinctive features or characteristics of Catholic schools...Ultimately, however, the Catholic school is distinguishable from public or secular schools because there is a fundamental difference in the intentional learning environment which Catholic schools seek to create. That unique learning environment which is both the genius and the hallmark of a Catholic school is Christian community – a place and space where the echoes and presence of God are everywhere” [Murphy 2007, pages 116-117].

Catholic “distinctiveness” flows from this position. The ‘lens’ through which we look through proclaims who we are and demonstrates who we are; it does not compare.

4. A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner who develops and demonstrates their God-given potential.

If we are not comparing, then what do we stand for? Some information from our system documents, from Church documents and from reflection is outlined below. This is where we need to engage in discernment; to dig down deep at the school level engaging our staff, parents, parishes and students.

Who Are We?

The following five components of what constitutes a Catholic school are taken from documents by Archbishop Michael Miller of The Sacred Congregation for Education at The Vatican and a commentary from Gerald Grace entitled, *“Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality.”*

Living out the following areas is a demonstrable example of a Catholic school both in terms of how Archbishop Pocock wrote about it and how Archbishop Romero described our role.

5. A collaborative contributor who finds meaning, dignity and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good.

- 1. Education in The Faith:** Education in the Faith happens in an integral way throughout the day and in all curricular and non-curricular activities. Religious Education and Family Life Programs are integral parts of the formal curriculum.
- 2. Formation in Solidarity & Community:** There is a faith community present and is evidenced through policies and procedures; there is a sacramental presence and an ethos that flows from the Gospel Values.
- 3. Education for the Common Good:** The school is based on a Catholic world view as evidenced through the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*.
- 4. There is a preferential option for the poor:** The school engages in social justice activities to ensure that what we are fortunate to have is shared equitably. We also realize that poverty of spirit and poverty of being through exclusion is as critical a need for addressing as is economic poverty.
- 5. Academic Education for Service:** That the school has an outward focus; a focus that is for the common good and is based on ensuring our students

and staff are aware of and take up the challenge to live-out the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*.

Throughout 2006-2007 the school community dialogued around questions that flowed from the November 2006 symposium on Catholic Education that was held in Toronto. This symposium drew together the partners in Catholic Education from across Ontario. The result was a series of questions that the local Catholic school board was asked to have its community discuss and discern. From this dialogue both a local and a provincial report was developed. Both reports are posted on our web page www.wcdsb.ca.

We have a challenge and opportunity for 2007-2008. The questions raised by our provincial and local reports are outlined below. As well, there is a specific question on inclusion for discussion and dialogue. Our system is currently undergoing a review examining how it is we are in fact responding to inclusion. As a Catholic community inclusion is the natural living out of the gospel values. Accordingly, given the five characteristics of what must be present to be a Catholic school, the following questions are for the board, for senior administration, for our Program and Student Services staff, for each school administrator and staff, for each school council, each school-parish team to discuss and dialogue. Where are we in living out our mission at the system and site level? What actions can we take today, next month, in an ongoing basis to close the gaps?

Questions from the follow-up to the 2006 Symposium on Catholic Education: (Please refer to the full report on our board web page for information on each area).

6. A caring family member who attends to family, school, parish, and the wider community.

7. A responsible citizen who gives witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the sacredness of human life.

- 1. How can you communicate and promote Catholic Education?**
- 2. How can you support the reconfiguration of the Home, School and Parish Partnership?**
- 3. What types of Adult Faith Development and Faith Formation Programs do you participate in through the school system and/or local parish? What can be done to enhance these opportunities?**
- 4. We are called through our baptism to be an inclusive system where each learner is welcomed, respected and uniquely supported to reach their full potential. What can be done to enhance inclusiveness as part of our culture and daily practice?**
- 5. What can you do personally to address each of the areas outlined above?**

Please discuss and dialogue on the above questions during this school year. The ICE Symposium Team will interact with you throughout the year to gather back from you your thoughts and suggestions. Over time I hope these questions and additional ones generated each year will be a focal point for your discussion with staff, school councils and your parish team.