

**Catholic Education:
Visioning a Future
in Faith, Hope and Love**


Resources for Faith Development

A sower went out to sow . . .

Canadian Catholic School
Trustees' Association

***Catholic Education:
A National Conversation***

September 2008

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a wooden seed tray. The tray is made of light-colored wood and has a large, recessed cross-shaped hole in the center. The hand is positioned at the bottom left, with the thumb and index finger visible, holding the tray. The background is a soft, warm orange glow.

Prepared by John Podgorski
Adapted from adult faith resources developed and
implemented by the Ottawa Catholic School Board

Catholic Education: Visioning a Future in Faith, Hope and Love

“A sower went out to sow...”

Goals

To build support for Catholic education, through reflective and authentic dialogue.

To envision a future for Catholic education inspired by faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ.

We do need to talk. We need to talk about the future of our Catholic schools, a future that is often challenged, yet at the same time full of purpose and hope. We have a great tradition of teaching, learning and sharing the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in Canada for more than 200 years and now, perhaps more than ever, that message is needed in today's secular society.

Rationale

All too often, we attend conferences, returning with energy and enthusiasm that slowly fades over time. There is no real way of duplicating a conference experience, but one can bring something back to help others to enjoy a renewed commitment to Catholic education.

This resource will provide you with ideas and strategies for bringing the Catholic education conversation back to your local setting, whatever and wherever that might be.

The conversation is important for many reasons. Without a forward looking visioning and dialogue, there is the danger that Catholic education will be seen as a relic from another historical age. This adult faith process, then, reflects on the strengths of Catholic education, faces its challenges, and visions a hope filled future.

We assume, therefore, that:

- support for Catholic education requires an ongoing conversation with all partners;
- a simple, clear language is required when celebrating the value of Catholic education with the Catholic community, and with the wider public;
- our hope for the future of Catholic education rests with the commitment and inspiration of our partners today.

To begin.... meet with a small local group

Since the goal is to keep the conversation alive, the Catholic education conversation can continue with groups from six to 600.

Begin small

A group of six or so can engage in this process.

The leader's script provides a basis for developing your own conversation.

Three sessions are outlined. Feel free to choose the session or sessions that respond to your needs.

Going further...

If the small group conversation is successful, consider expanding it to a larger group that would include representation from school staffs, administration, parents, students, priests and parishes. Such a gathering involves a much higher level of organization — some planning considerations are included. The same script can be used. However, to spark conversation with a larger group, have people from the small group experience share their stories before the large group discussion begins.

A framework

The three sessions are built around three key topics:

We promote and protect Catholic education

by celebrating and sharing our successes.

We promote and protect Catholic education

by engaging challenges with a variety of creative initiatives.

We grow and develop as partners in Catholic education

acting in the hope of a blessed future.

All three topics are essential to building a positive base of support for Catholic schools.

First, we articulate and celebrate the positive contributions that Catholic schools make in the lives of young people.

Then we engage the challenges to discuss creative strategies.

Finally, we vision and build for the future in hope, faith and love.

A key dimension to the conversation is the focus on story, on life experience. By moving from theory to lived experience, the conversation is grounded in human realities with both their successes and challenges. Furthermore, the sharing of story builds community. We get to know each other on an interpersonal level, helping to build mutual respect, understanding, and collegiality. The conversation itself, then, becomes a means of building relationships that will ultimately support Catholic schools.

Leader's Script

Note: A proposed script is provided below. Please adapt to meet your requirements.

Call to Order

Welcome Remarks

Introduction

We are about to participate in a conversation where we can share our experiences and ideas about our Catholic schools.

The focus is to promote and protect Catholic education
by celebrating and sharing our successes
and
by engaging challenges with a variety of creative initiatives.

We trust that this will be a sacred time where we gather as a Christian community to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our young people in new and creative ways.

Call to Worship

We will now begin our time together with prayer.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray....

Gracious God,

You bless us every day with encounters that challenge us to grow in faith, hope and love.

Be with us today as we gather in your name.

Bless us with your Spirit of wisdom and understanding, courage and truth.

We ask this through Christ our Lord and our teacher.

Amen.

A Reading from the Gospel according to Mark...

Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Mark 4:1-20

Reflection by Rev. Peter Sanders, C.S.J.

Anyone from a farming background knows that when the farmer goes sowing he does so in the spring and he does so on well prepared soil. So they must question what was wrong with the sower in the Gospel. But since it is a parable and precisely because parables are to upset us, they are to provoke us into new ways of thinking, giving us new insights.

For the sower in the Gospel sows with wild abandon, casting the seed far and wide and everywhere. That is the way that Christ proclaimed the Word of God which was his mission: he proclaimed it everywhere whether it was accepted or not.

We, as faithful, are baptized into that same mission of Christ and are to spread the Word of God everywhere. As a Catholic school system, we are also called to proclaim the Word of God with the rest of the people of God. It is a special place where we can proclaim that special message and unless we proclaim the message it will not be proclaimed — that is, God's Word will not be spoken. That is why we have to put that aspect in the forefront of our schools. That is what makes Catholic schools distinctive.

We are all aware of the dangers that exist in our society today — of the threats that exist to our school system. But if we do not emphasize our reason for existence — the ability to proclaim the word of God, to be followers of Christ, and sowers of God's Word — then we will fail our mission.

Silent Reflection

Session 1

A Language of Faith

Goal

To promote and protect Catholic education by celebrating and sharing our successes.

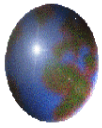
Celebrating the positive Gospel principles of our Catholic schools strengthens Catholic education.

We need to be aware of the positive things that we are doing, share our successes, and express what we do well in clear language.

We will hear stories that will help us to improve Catholic education.

Attached is a framework that provides language to describe what we do in Catholic education. Please note that all of these principles refer back to the Gospel of Jesus as the source, the inspiration, the challenge that energizes and directs each of these principles.

Please have a look at the framework, taking a few moments for study.



Gospel Principles in Catholic Education



Which of the Gospel principles do you consider to be the most important?

Describe times when you see this Gospel principle in action in your Catholic school.

Gospel Principle

worship
family life education
morality
invitation
adult faith

religious education
Eucharist
social action
retreats
prayer

FAITH

Gospel Principle

High Expectations
Perseverance
Inspiration

Optimism
Commitment
Goals

HOPE

Forgiveness
Giving Second Chances

Gospel Principle

Solidarity
Compassion
Family

Forgiveness
Kindness
Friend:

Service
LOVE
Caring

Forgiveness
Peace
Patience

Good
Relationship
Empathy
Respect

Gospel Principle

Sacredness of Creation
Value of All Life

Sacredness of human body

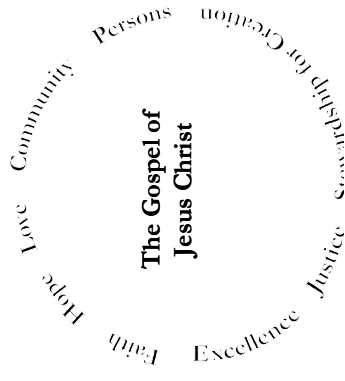
STEWARDSHIP FOR CREATION

Energy Conservation
Global Awareness

Care of the Environment
Care for the school indoors and outdoors

Wellness

Gospel Principles in Catholic Education



Gospel Principle

Welcoming
No Bullying
Safe Schools
Honesty
Family
Parish

Inclusion
Peace
Respect

Conflict
Resolutor
Celebr

COMMUNITY

Gratitude
Unity i
Diversi
Global
Citizenship
Relations
Cooperator

Gospel Principle

preferential option for the poor and vulnerable
fairness
restorative justice
courage

human rights
Local and global
JUSTICE
discipline
generosity
peace
equality
awareness

Gospel Principle

Giftedness
Success
Commitment
Leadership
Achievement
Wisdom
EXCELLENCE
Initiative
Celebration
Responsibility

Gospel Principle

humility
self worth
Respect for all
reverence for life
Welcoming

humble
Luster
chase
jus
integr
welcoming

DIGNITY OF PERSONS

Session 2

Responding to the Challenges Facing Catholic Education

Goal

We promote and protect Catholic education by engaging the challenges with creative initiatives.

Introduction

Across Canada, the situation of Catholic schools is quite different from province to province, region to region, school to school. The challenges come at various levels: economic issues related to funding; political issues related to lack of public support for Catholic education; cultural issues related to our intensively secular, consumer, information driven culture; and social issues related to families and youth. Some of the challenges relate to parish-school relationships.

Instead of worrying or complaining, light a candle.

Come up with a good idea, a different approach, a fresh initiative.

What are the challenges facing our Catholic schools?

How do we respond with creative strategies?

Session Three

Visioning a Future for Catholic Education

Goal

By envisioning a best future for Catholic education, we plan steps to move to fulfill that vision.

Introduction

Build Bethlehem Everywhere: A Statement on Catholic Education (CCSTA publication) states that “in Catholic education we keep the dialogue alive with a new generation by helping them to see the mystery of God’s presence and action in the world and in their lives.” We do this with a faith-filled hope. Hope in Christ gives us the audacity, the courage to envision a better future for our Catholic community. Hope gives us the strength and persistence to strive and work for that vision with full knowledge that this dream will forever be one step out of our reach.

This visioning should inspire us to strive tirelessly to improve Catholic education, to build Bethlehem everywhere, to make a home for the Kingdom of God in our Catholic school communities.

The measure of our hope for Catholic education is strengthened by our faith in God, by our love of God, and of each other.

Describe the best possible Catholic school that you can imagine.

As a Catholic community, what would we need to do to arrive at this destination?

Prayer for a Catholic School Community

Leader: Lord, we thank you for the gift of community that blesses and sustains us as we journey together.

All: We are called by the Gospel of Jesus to live as one body, one community in Christ.

Leader: Lord, we thank you for the light of your **love** that leads us to **justice**.

All: We are guided by Christ's call to justice and love.

Leader: Lord, you called us to honour **the dignity of all persons**, the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the needy, the broken hearted.

All: Jesus of Nazareth calls us to stand up for the dignity of all persons.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you loved the beauty of the world, the gifts of creation.

All: In the seasons and the gifts of nature that surround us, God speaks to us each day, calling us to **stewardship for all creation**.

Leader: Lord Jesus, your death and resurrection offers **hope** for our tired world. Our **faith** in you sustains us.

All: Bless us Lord as we journey in faith, hope and love.

Intercessions

Let us now hold in our prayers all members of our community who are suffering through difficult times, with sickness or with grief.

Closing Prayer: Let us join in the prayer that Jesus taught us.
"Our Father..."

Blessing

Let us pray for God's blessing...

May the grace and peace of God, the loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the wisdom and strength of the Holy Spirit come upon you and remain forever.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.....thanks be to God.