

CATHOLIC EDUCATION SPEECH
LUX NUNQUAM DESIT
May the light never Fall

Catholic education is truly a gift to behold. After 140 plus years it continues to serve the needs of our community. This gift was preserved by our parents and grandparents who dedicated themselves to its gospel principles.

It is now time to reflect on those principles so we as the present stewards, can defend it and pass it on to the next generation.

As parents we do this by role modelling our Catholic values for our children and within our community. We selected a Catholic Education because of our firm belief in the values of our Catholic faith. Our schools infuse our faith values into the daily lives of our children. Discussions such as the sanctity of life are front and center and addressed in the lessons they learn in high school throughout a variety of subjects areas. Our schools validate the sacredness of all students. We as followers of Christ believe that “God created each of us in his image and likeness.” The diversity of abilities, cultures, and linguistics within our schools form a blessed blend of unique creations which are our students.

Students educated within Catholic schools emerge as beacons of hope for a world that needs their knowledge, that needs their compassion, that needs their unique gift of themselves, to serve as emissaries of the light of Jesus Christ.

Catholic education makes an enormous contribution to our entire society because our faith teaches us that we are all family, brothers and sisters are we.

Our Catholic Graduation Expectations clearly are aligned with our gospel values. Let's revisit them and examine these value added benefits to our society.

Effective Communicators:

- Competency in communicating both verbally and in written form
- Upon further reflection - Students also are taught to communicate Catholic values through their actions

Reflective Thinking:

- Analyzing skills with regard to the context they encounter
- Upon further reflection – students reflect on societal issues through the eyes of Jesus.

Collaborative Contribution:

- working together as a team
- Upon further reflection – working for good causes for the benefit of others

Caring Family Member

- Contributing to the family structure
- Upon further reflection – caring for your siblings. Example: Sacrificing a personal night out to babysit.

Lifelong Learners

- Belief that education is ongoing through your life
- Upon further reflection – learning is more than just curriculum. It means learning about respecting elders for their wisdom, about respecting about those who are “different” and extending a helping hand to others in life’s journey.

Responsible Citizen

- accepting responsibility regarding your civic duties
- Upon further reflection – emphasizing in a community and that everyone is family and belongs; it means standing up for Catholic values when political decisions and societal norms challenge them

Discerning Believer

- Students are encouraged to ask questions about Catholic stances so that they understand the faith background that validates the Catholic position on these various issues. Students are also encouraged to examine introspectively their personal relationship with God.

In Catholic education then, we move our students from knowledge to wisdom, from law to social justice, from a solely personal perspective to a communal one.

And now to our top news story of the day: Catholic Schools in Ontario will no longer be funded by the province under Bill XYZ which was passed into law today. What in essence does this mean to parents of children enrolled in the publicly funded English Catholic school system? This is a fictional news story at present .It did urge me however to reflect and ask the question: What would the resulting consequences be? Would it matter? Is publicly funded Catholic Education worth preserving?

In response to this I thought to reflect on my own experience as a graduate of Catholic education, and in my role as a teacher, principal, board wide administrator, and parent. What did I receive? How did I contribute to our community as a result? Let me begin by acknowledging that though the curriculum taught is the same in all Ontario schools the implementation philosophy differs. Catholic schools permeate the lessons taught with our faith principles. We are taught that our education must result in service to others, not just other Catholics but “All” others. This results

from the belief that God created each of us in His image and likeness. We believe that God doesn't make junk! We are therefore all family.

Diversity in all its beauty is affirmed in our schools through our faith. Our students are engaged in service projects both locally and internationally. Free the Children is but one example. They involve themselves in making a difference through the various service learning initiatives. This promotes within them a responsible attitude, an awareness of the world they live in and a duty to care for others as their brothers and sisters. Parents are called to create and recreate Christian community as the pervasive and distinctive learning environment of Catholic schools through their support of such social justice programs. This is the kind of world promoted in our schools and the one I want our students to continue working towards building.

Our schools promote the dignity of persons who have cognitive and physical challenges with a welcoming environment.

Jean Vanier's Quote

All human are sacred, whatever their culture, race, or religion, whatever their capacities or incapacities, and whatever their weakness or strength may be. Each of us has an instrument to bring to vast orchestra of humanity, and each of us needs help to become all that we might be.

As we recall from Scripture, Jesus said "Let the little children come." He was not selective. He reached out to the marginalized. **He was inclusive.** This sense of community is built on the lessons taught to us about Jesus in our religion classes, liturgical celebrations and in our daily interactions each day. The Catholic bishops in our province have, time and again, demonstrated courage and leadership by challenging Catholics and all people of good will to engage and embrace the church's rich social- justice

teachings. On a variety of issues and in many different contexts- the sanctity of unborn life, pursuit of peace, economic justice, and so on- the bishops have exercised, prudently but forcefully, the teaching authority of their offices. In this way they have served as faithful shepherds and pastors for us as Catholic parents.

Prayer is fundamental to our faith and practiced in schools throughout the liturgical calendar. At Christmas we are reminded that “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Prayers offered for the intentions of others in challenging times within our schools demonstrate support for fellow students who are seen as family members. Whenever I face personal difficulties I look upwards and say: I cannot handle this alone Lord, I need your help. It sure is nice to know that the answer will always be affirmative. This catholicity is validated by us as parents at home.

Catholics have a wonderful lens through which they can view life. It is called faith. It enables us to make sense of the tumultuous world in which we live.

I feel fortunate to have had the grace of a Catholic education and thank my parents for that gift. I want my children to have the same experience.

Catholic education offers a perspective on life that is built on unwavering faith principles. It provides citizens that are community centered, have a social conscience and assert the dignity of all through the practice of the principles of faith hope and charity through the advocacy of equity and inclusion. Will it be said of our generation that we presided over the demise of the most effective and important system for evangelization in the history of the Church in our province? Will it be said of our generation what we lacked the resolve to preserve our sacred heritage built upon the sacrifice of our predecessors? Will it be said of our generation that we abandoned these powerful instruments of justice that provide educational opportunity and

hope for all families? Surely not. Instead, when the story of Catholic schools is written, we want our chapter to record our unity as a community of parents standing side by side and walking hand in hand to preserve Catholic education.

Today, we gather as a community of Catholic parents dedicated to the preservation of the faith values that are propagated in our Catholic Schools.

Helen Keller's advice provides us with some words for reflection: **"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."**

Catholic education is in your hands. **"Sometimes we never miss what we value until it's gone."** In my life a Catholic schooling made a difference! So, let's work to preserve it for the future generations.

Lux Numquam Resit.

May the Light Never Fall on Catholic Education.

Thank you & God Bless you.

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