

## Odyssey to Thunder Bay

As I gazed through the slightly frosted plane window my eyes were treated to a veritable feast of sparkling lights below and glittering stars above. I was landing in Thunder Bay to keynote at the OAPCE Parent Forum celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As I deplaned for my initial visit to this jewel of the north, the chill of the evening was accompanied by an unusual sense of tranquility.

For a citizen of T.O., Thunder Bay was proving to be a delightful discovery. Awaiting the arrival of my travelling companion Brian Evoy and myself was the welcoming warmth of the north emanating through the person of Aimee Gerdevich, conference chair and our host. Following a brief drive to the hotel, I succumbed to the pure northern air and slept soundly.

Bright and early next day I arose to view a clear blue sky tinged with brilliant sunshine. The location for the forum was the auditorium of St Ignatius Catholic High School. The audience I was to address included: Bishop Colli, Barb Spadoni, Director of the Superior North CDSB, teachers, administrators and parents. This Catholic community had traveled a hop, skip and jump to attend the forum. From a northern perspective this meant traveling up to ten hours. Quite a revelation for a city boy from Toronto to comprehend but I was learning.

The attendees were amicable and responsive. They participated enthusiastically in the various session activities and remained fully engaged throughout the day. My one on one and small group conversations revealed the rich giftedness of this northern Catholic community through their personal stories and probing questions.

My various leadership roles have taught me that successful educational outcomes are achieved through collaboration. Simply put “One for all and all for one” (Alexander Dumas/The Three Musketeers). When applied in a Catholic context it involves bringing people together in community so they can share their God given talents in pursuit of a common purpose. This was clearly documented throughout the gospels in the actions of Jesus. I personally experienced this through two students from Catholic education. Sarah and Adam Gerdevich were assigned to assist me for the day. They not only met but surpassed all expectations. They helped me to not only demonstrate competence but more importantly to look COOL! “Well done good and faithful servants” (Matthew 25:21)

It was my distinct privilege to have been the keynote speaker in Thunder Bay. Meeting my northern Catholic family and “breaking bread” together was a real blessing. This email I received from Sarah was gracious and empowers me to continue to promote the value of Catholic education.

"Dr. Ash, thank you very much for coming and speaking at the regional parent forum on April 4th. I being a high school student exceptionally enjoyed your presentation. I really enjoyed the video of the little boy colouring the

picture, I got the impression of the different perspectives that everyone has towards people who may seem different but really are just thinking either differently or outside the box. So thank you very, very, very much for taking time to come up to Thunder Bay to speak to us.

Sincerely, Sarah Gerdevich, gr.9"

I returned to Toronto with a more informed perspective about life in the north. In Thunder Bay I was welcomed with gracious hospitality and as a member of the family. TO EVERYONE I met, thanks for the gift of your time and the grace of your presence. You are truly all SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPALIDOCIOUS!  
I look forward to a return visit on HOLY SPIRIT AIRLINES in the near future.

Blessings,

Dr. Ash