

On Thursday, April 7th, 2011, our President and Executive Secretary had the privilege of attending as guests at the EOCCC 16th Annual Conference. Here is a summary of the inspiring address by keynote speaker Noel Martin.

It is part of the human nature to celebrate and we need to celebrate the Holy Spirit within us. Noel described the celebration in each of the categories of who, where, when, what and why.

The 'who' is the Catholic teachers whose ethos of teaching is grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are 36,000 teachers in Ontario and the work they do is clearly shown in the way our students are succinctly able to articulate the depth of Catholic Education. Last weekend, students made our teachers proud through the celebration they hosted at the Student Leadership conference held in Niagara Falls. We are all called to a purpose, starting with Baptism and at some point we encounter a 'burning bush' that draws us to Catholic Education. God calls us and we respond.

The 'where' identifies the place in which we celebrate the 'Spirit'. We do this in our lives and in our schools and we are celebrating in our schools as a Catholic community. The school-home-parish triad is a partnership that needs to see further strengthening between the home and parish and between the parish and the school much in the same way that the school and home partnership is one that is very strong.

The 'what' is the Spirit. The Spirit has become the forgotten Paraclete in our Catholic community. Our children think of the Holy Spirit as a dove yet Pentecost Sunday is a celebration of the receiving of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the house was filled with a violent wind and the Disciples of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit when tongues of fire rested on each of them. We, as a Catholic community, need to revisit Pentecost and remember what is truly meant by receiving the 'Spirit'.

The 'when' we celebrate occurs whenever people come together. We need to remember that Pentecost happened at a meeting of people. At our meetings we need to focus on what is important, not just what is urgent.

'Why' do we Celebrate the Spirit? Because our God is a loving God! Our God is always with us and our God is always patient with us. It is the strength of our faith that supports us through difficult times and to carry us through these times we need to see the real person within us that is the Spirit of God. Although there is a 'fear of change', our teachers have brought change to our classrooms and succeeded in making Ontario a great place of education.

We need to have a greater awareness and listen to our life. We need to wake up and unclog our senses. Our full presence and participation is demanded if we are to participate in the 'dance of life'. Noel used the story of Jesus and the woman at the well to prompt consideration of what is "the bucket" we are using to access "the well" to quench the thirst in our spiritual lives? Do we have the "mechanism" in place to draw the life giving water from the well on a regular basis or just in a crisis? Does it feel like some days you barely have a Dixie cup with a hole in the bottom rather than a beautiful, deep, fully seasoned reservoir? What is our "bucket" and is it allowing us to quench our spiritual thirst? Or are we starving our spirits in the business of our daily lives?

We must realize that in Catholic Education we are cultivating a garden, not guarding a museum. It is so important that we allow ourselves time every day to appreciate and be open to the “thin moments” as Noel called them. Moments where the distance between God and ourselves is the shortest it can be this side of heaven. It may be stopping to appreciate a beautiful sunrise or listening to the laughter of children as they play. It may be noticing the most beautiful flower on your way from meeting to meeting and stopping 30 seconds to really look at it. It may be feeling God’s love in the warmth of the spring sunshine on your back as you work at your computer completing long overdue reports – and stopping for just a moment to thank Him for this “thin moment” of grace and the time with Him. Recognizing these moments, pausing to give thanks and sharing these experiences allows us to feed our souls in order to ensure we have the spiritual energy to be the role models we are called to be, no matter what hat we may be wearing. As teachers, they need to ensure they are providing an opportunity for the Spirit to work within them as they are spiritual leaders for our children!