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Huron-Perth Catholic Schools Community Newsletter

Catholic Schools Teach Lessons In Human Dignity

(Originally printed in The Toronto Star - September 28, 2007.)

By **Bernard Murray and John Stunt**

There has been in recent weeks much focus and discussion on Ontario's strong publicly funded school system. Catholic schools are an integral part of that system, supported by 2.4 million Catholic ratepayers and the province's three major political parties.

What is missing from the current provincial discussion is information about the nature of Catholic education. These schools offer education in the Catholic tradition to hundreds of thousands of students who reflect Ontario's diverse cultures and ethnic groups.

Every school day, some 670,000 young people make their way into 1,650 English and French Catholic schools that dot our province, in large and small, urban and rural centres. Whatever else awaits them in these schools, the intention of their parents and of Catholic school trustees and educators is that these young people find themselves in the distinctive learning environment of a Catholic Christian community.

The first message relayed to these young people is that each one of them is worthwhile, possesses great dignity and is of infinite value. They learn that this comes to them ultimately because they reflect in their lives the image and the mystery of God, who is at the heart of the world they inhabit and for which they are responsible. They learn this throughout all aspects of the curriculum - not just the religious education and family life courses.

Catholic education views human life as an integration of body, mind and spirit. Rooted in this vision, Catholic education fosters the search for knowledge as a lifelong spiritual and academic quest. The expectations of Catholic graduates, therefore, are described not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but in terms of values, attitudes and actions.

In a society where conflicting values pull young people in all directions, Catholic schools speak words about the sacredness of life, the beauty

of love, the dignity of work and the importance of family. These teachings offer guideposts for human behaviour that flow from the Ten Commandments and the message of the gospel.

Young people hear of honouring their parents and of parents honouring their children. A consistent life ethic encourages them to see the relationship among all the world's peoples, especially the marginalized and the disadvantaged. Our students are taught to opt for the protection of life at all stages, to avoid the wrongness of bullying, to support the need for just social structures and to defy the folly of war.



Every school day in this province, 670,000 students attend 1,650 Catholic schools, like this one at St. Aloysius School in Stratford.

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Putting these lessons into practice is a formative part of a Catholic education. Our students are expected and encouraged to participate in a variety of community service projects to help the less fortunate in their communities.



St. Michael Catholic Secondary School choir singing at Mass at the November 1, 2007, system-wide professional development day.

Outreach projects to less developed countries or those areas affected by natural or man-made disasters are a hallmark of the Catholic school curriculum.

Our schools hold out to our young people the sacredness of promises and the meaning of fidelity, particularly in marriage and the family. They learn the value of truth and respect for the beliefs of other people. They learn this within the context of a curriculum focused on academic excellence.

This pursuit of academic excellence has been a hallmark of Catholic education from its inception. The goal of Catholic schools is and always has been to help all our students, whatever their unique gifts, talents and challenges, to achieve their full potential and to experience success.

Through the dedication and hard work

of some 43,000 teachers and administrators, Catholic schools today are a vital part of the success story of Ontario's publicly funded education system.

Our schools and school boards consistently meet or exceed provincial expectations in student achievement and program delivery. Many Catholic school boards have numbered among those



Sacred Heart students in Wingham donating food to the local food bank.

showing the highest improvement rates as measured by the provincial testing program.

In addition, our Catholic schools and educators have been widely recognized as innovators in providing excellent integrated programs and services for students with special needs.

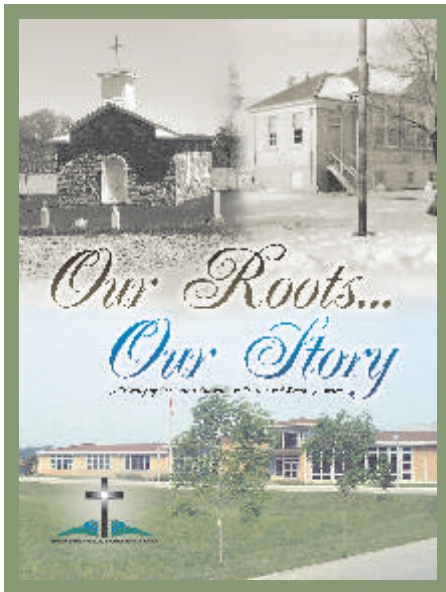
We are not suggesting that graduates of these schools and the educators within them escape the weaknesses and woundedness that are part of human life. These young people are exposed, however, to a view of the human journey that offers meaning and direction.

Ontario's Catholic schools have maintained that their distinctive educational approach offers an ongoing contribution not only to Catholic children and their families but to society as a whole.

Graduates of Catholic schools are active and often outstanding contributors to public life in Ontario. As leaders and workers in politics, business, arts, education, health care and volunteer services, they make meaningful and important contributions to improving their communities. Without a doubt, Catholic education is embedded in the very social fabric of Ontario.

Bernard Murray is President of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. John Stunt is its Executive Director.

Telling Our Story



The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board recently published a book entitled, "Our Roots...Our Story". It's a fascinating look at the origins of Catholic education in Huron and Perth counties.

On Thursday, November 1, 2007, the board launched the book at its system-

wide professional development day at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Stratford. In addition to the 400 staff members who attended, approximately 50 special guests were in attendance, including the teaching Sisters (Sisters of St. Joseph, Ursuline and Loretto orders), the 1969 Board of Trustees, the 1969 Director of Education Dr. John Vintar, area politicians, and members of the History Book Committee who tirelessly devoted their time to the writing of the book.

The cost per copy is \$20. To order this wonderful keepsake, please contact Elaine DeCorte at the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board: 1-800-265-8508 or 519-345-2440, elaine_decorte@hpcdsb.edu.on.ca

Members of the writing committee included:

Margaret Rowland, Larry Cook, Jim Gaylor, Ron Marcy, Sam Alberico, Larry Murray, Clara Chandler, Inez Haid, Clarice Dalton, Anita Frayne, Corinne Redmond-Cline, Jim Steffler, Ann Doherty, Vince Young, Elaine Coxon, Heather Klopp, Mary Regier, Pat Meidinger, Marg Suplat, Anna Marie Cook, Cecilia

Mittelholtz, Paul Seliske, Jayne Walsh, Fran Craig, Bill and Helene Regier, Larry Langan, Elaine DeCorte and Denise DeJong.



Members of the original 1969 Board of Trustees include, from left, Howard Shantz, Vincent Young (Chair), Dr. John Vintar (Director of Education), and Keith Culliton (Vice-Chair).



Pictured, from left, are Perth-Wellington MPP John Wilkinson, The Most Reverend Bishop Ronald Fabbro, Superintendent of Education Dan Parr, Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson.

Did you know?...

- The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board's theme for this year is 'Stewards of Creation.' All schools and the board office can play a part in preserving our environment. The board is therefore working to adopt and promote the Ontario EcoSchools conservation strategies to reduce waste, energy consumption, and ecological degradation throughout our schools and school communities.
- The provincial government has issued a challenge to all school boards to achieve a high school graduation rate of 85% by 2010/11. We are happy to report that our graduation rate is consistently above 90% and in 2006/07 it was 91%.
- Every school in the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board has been recognized by the provincial government for participating in The Healthy Schools Challenge issued by the Ministries of Education and Health Promotion.
- Seventy-five teddy bears came to St. Ambrose School with primary students and their families for a literacy evening, sharing bedtime stories, milk and cookies. All the children chose a book to take home to read to their bear.
- For three consecutive years, the HPCDSB has been one of the highest achieving boards in the province in literacy and numeracy.
- Your property taxes automatically default to public support when you change your residence. To continue directing your taxes to the separate school system you must fill out a Direction of School Support form. These are available at the board office by calling 1-800-265-8508 or 519-345-2440.
- Our two secondary schools registered 39 youths in apprenticeships through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.
- Youth-led Masses are celebrated at Immaculate Conception Church in Stratford at 7:00 p.m. on the last Sunday of each month. This is part of a collaborative effort by St. Michael Catholic Secondary School and the Stratford Catholic parishes to engage all young people and their families in our liturgies.

Hands-on Approach To Math Gets Top Marks

A great math program always includes a hands-on approach to teaching. The old Chinese proverb says it best: 'I hear and forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.'

At the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board we embrace the hands-on approach in math. We've increased the use of interactive computer programs and we're regularly using manipulatives in the classroom. (A manipulative is a physical object students can touch, feel and use to explore different mathematical concepts and solve problems. For example, coloured blocks that come apart might be used to teach fractions.)

"When I watch what my students are trying to do with a manipulative it tells me how they're thinking," says Dan Gracey, a Grade 5-6 teacher at Precious Blood School. "I can tell whether they're going in the right direction or not – and that helps me teach better."

The old math model relied heavily on memorization and was more one-dimensional. The hands-on approach to learning math not only makes it more interesting for students, it adds flexibility and encourages exploration and risk-taking – essential components of learning.

"Students have to take risks when

trying to solve a math problem. If they don't at least attempt a solution, it's pretty hard to move forward. It's also difficult for the teacher to help," explains Vince Trocchi, the board's Numeracy Coordinator for elementary grades. "We don't want apprehensive students afraid to take on new challenges."

"To train students for tomorrow, we have to employ technology today."

The hands-on approach to learning math not only makes it more interesting for students, it adds flexibility and encourages exploration and risk-taking – essential components of learning.

The computer software used to teach math is akin to the calculator used by earlier generations of students. "They're both tools," says Mr. Trocchi, "and students are so used to using computers they tend to learn very quickly. To train students for tomorrow, we have to employ technology today."

A Grade 8 student, for example, might learn cost analysis and determine a break-even point in a fictional business using a computer spread sheet to examine costs and revenue. By changing just one or two numbers, a whole different financial picture automatically emerges, which gives the student a better understanding of one number's relationship to the others.

Mary-Jo Drager, a Grade 3 teacher at Precious Blood School, has also seen the difference manipulatives make in learning math at the primary level. "They help reach all different types of learners. Some kids need to 'do' to understand the

math that's going on underneath," she says. "These are not toys. They're

"Some kids need to 'do' to understand the math that's going on underneath. These are not toys. They're powerful tools for teaching mathematics – and they work."

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There are lots of helpful websites to help students and parents expand and explore their mathematical skills. These are listed in the ministry's resource:

Helping Your Child Do Mathematics: A Guide for Parents

www.teachers.ash.org.au/jeather/maths/dictionary.html

mathforum.org/students/elem/probs.html

<http://www.tvokids.com/>

nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html

cemc.uwaterloo.ca/mathfrog

www.kidsites.com/sites-edu/math.htm

www.geocities.com/enchantedforest/tower/1217/math3.html

www.kids.gov/k_science.htm

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/laac/numbers/ch1.shtml

www.brainpop.com/math/seeall/



Everyday Ways To Improve Student Writing

Our goal this year is to improve the writing skills of all elementary students.

At our end, teachers will be given extra training and professional learning opportunities designed to help them learn more about the connections between reading and writing.

But parents can help too – in fun, everyday ways. The end of the school day doesn't mean learning has to end too. There are ways you too can help your child write better and more often.



Tips for parents of students in primary grades:

- Don't limit what you write with – or what you write on. The sky's the limit! Try pudding, sticks or fingers in mud, earth, snow and sand. Use sparklers, steamed up windows and mirrors, or bubble soap markers for some super sudsy learning.
- Play writing games. Make a game of letter finding. Show your child how to form a particular letter then go hunting for it in your house or in a book. (Count the number of 'Ds' on the page!) Or find a picture your child likes then ask him/her to write words or a sentence about it.
- Start them writing at an early age. Children often learn to write before they can actually read. You can encourage writing by showing them how to print their own names or the names of friends and family members. Buy a notebook with lines so they can learn to write their letters properly, or a practice book that has letters they can trace.

For more great tips on ways to inspire writing in primary grades, check out:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng/tips/mathkto3.html>

Tips for parents of children in Grades 4 to 8:

- Be a writing role model. Let your child see you writing whenever possible. It can be letters, work assignments, letters to the editor, emails. Help your child understand about writing for different purposes (short stories, poems, letters, lists etc.). Keep different types of reading materials in your home, including books, magazines, newspapers, comic books and illustrated novels.
- Keep writing sessions short and sweet. When your child has a writing assignment, help to create an outline before the writing begins. Then write for a bit, and then take a short break. Don't expect your son/daughter to write the entire assignment in one go.
- Embrace cyberspace writing. Encourage your children to write emails or instant-message with family and friends. Exchange emails with your child if he/she has their own email address.

For more great tips on ways to inspire writing in Grades 4 to 8, check out:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng/tips/read4to6.html>

This is another great website with ideas on how you can help your child: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng/>

Software Helps Create Independent Writers

Students all learn to write at different speeds and at their own level.

That's why something called assistive software is proving to be so popular in our schools. It's not only increasing vocabulary, it's allowing students to progress at their own pace and complete writing assignments with the necessary level of assistance – which they control.

Write:OutLoud is a talking word processor and one of the exciting computer programs available to all students in the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board. Here's how it works: as the student types in a word the computer says it out loud and highlights it at the same time. If the word is misspelled, it's also underlined. When the student finishes the sentence with a period, the program

reads the sentence back. If a word is missing it quickly becomes apparent. If the student hears 'The dog fast.' he/she knows there's a word missing and can go back and correct the sentence to read, for example, 'The dog ran fast.' This minimizes the need for teacher intervention and encourages students to work independently.

CoWriter 4000 is a grammar smart word coach program we piloted last year and now offer to all our students. It's known as predictive word software and it's especially useful for students who face physical or intellectual challenges. Here's how it works: As students begin to type in a word, the computer predicts the intended word and fills in the rest of the letters. A list of possible words will also pop up and the student can chose the right one – which is

also pronounced out loud.

“A lot of students struggle with vocabulary and this encourages them to use more complex words instead of the easiest word they can think of,” says Stacey Rietmeyer, Education for All Resource Support Teacher. “It exposes students to richer words and builds vocabulary. It also encourages them to work independently.”



Preparing Children – And Parents – For Kindergarten

Next year's kindergarten students and their parents are already getting a taste of what it's all about. Early registration, which began this November, is part of the Calling All Three Year Olds (CATYO) initiative, a partnership between the district health units, the public and Catholic school boards, the Huron-Perth Centre, the Ontario Early Years Centre and other community agencies.

The goal is to ensure children have the best possible start to school.

Early registration allows children and their parents to meet the kindergarten teacher, school principal and school secretary ahead of time. "Having mom and dad there can really help alleviate fears about entering school," says

Dawne Boersen, Co-ordinator of Curriculum. "It's important everyone feels comfortable."

Parents will also have an opportunity to have their children screened for delays in developmental milestones, such as language, which is important since research tells us the years between three and seven are the most important times for language development. We also know that children who haven't reached developmental milestones by age seven will have a more difficult time learning to read and write. Early intervention means these children still have time to

develop skills before school starts – which better prepares them to succeed once they get there.



Speaking of St. Mike's and St. Anne's

Students, parents, alumni, and staff are all proud of their Catholic secondary schools in Huron and Perth counties. Check out what they have to say at http://www.hpcdsb.edu.on.ca/curriculum/secondary_curriculum.asp. Just click on the St. Anne's Information Video link, or the St. Michael Information Video link and listen. You'll like what you hear.

Improving Performance ... and Comfort Levels



St. Michael Catholic Secondary School is one of 12 schools in Ontario recognized as a provincial leader for its success in helping students

be better prepared for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT.)

Every year, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, an arms-length provincial government agency, gathers stories from across Ontario that illustrate how schools have made literacy

a school-wide priority and improved student performance.

How did St. Mike's do it? They formed a dynamic literacy team dedicated to empowering all staff. They shared best practices, enlisted the support of the school board and offered teachers relevant professional development opportunities.

It was all about helping students get ready.

St. Mike's Principal Tim Doherty said the strategy involved giving practice

tests to students, then reviewing the results to pinpoint areas of weakness. It became evident, for example, that some students needed help expressing their opinions in writing; others had challenges understanding graphical text. These practice sessions also began early – in March – and Grade 10 teachers in every department worked together to make sure the kinds of tasks the OSSLT includes were also covered in the practice tests.

Students said the exercises significantly reduced their anxiety and raised their comfort levels during the actual OSSLT.

Pilot Project Impresses Ministry of Education



A research experiment in the math department at St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School had such exciting results its authors were asked by the Ministry of Education to present their findings at the Fall Provincial Student Success Symposium in Toronto.

The pilot project was undertaken by St. Anne's Principal Chris Roehrig and Math Department Head Brian Marcy.

The methodology of the project was startling in its simplicity. It involved teachers working closely together to diagnose student performance, then collaborating to create targeted lessons that addressed the areas of weakness. The teachers then put those lessons to the test and measured the results – which were impressive. The number of students who scored at or above the provincial level in Grade 9 and 10 math increased by 11%.

“Teachers often find themselves working in isolation from other teachers, left to figure out the best teaching methods on their own,” pointed out Dan Parr, Superintendent of Education. “This research clearly shows that when they collaborate to test and refine teaching strategies, student learning benefits.”

The method and principles of the pilot project are now being applied to other subject areas at St. Anne's.

New Fitness Centre Working Out Well

Students at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School are finding it a lot more convenient to stay in shape thanks to the addition of a new fitness centre at the school.

The 1,440-square-foot room includes a variety of cardio equipment, weight machines, a free weight area and assorted exercise equipment. The school is also offering what has turned out to be a very popular complementary Grade 10 and 11 credit course in personal fitness. Students also have the option of joining the Fitness Club, where they work out before or after school, or during lunch breaks.



“The new fitness room is amazing,” says Eric Rops, a Grade 12 St. Mike's student who works out first thing in the morning before classes start. “It's as good as any fitness club I've been to. It's great to be educating our minds, but we need to keep our bodies in shape too. This just makes it easier.”

The fitness room is part of a new addition that also includes a second gymnasium with washrooms and change areas, a science room and seven new classrooms. The first phase of the construction project, completed in February 2007, added a new technology facility to accommodate the growing

numbers of students pursuing an education in the skilled-trades.



Living The Faith In Our Catholic Secondary Schools

We're proud of the contribution our Catholic school graduates make to the communities in Huron-Perth and beyond. And we're proud of the job our schools and teachers do, with the help and support of our parishes and student families. All of you play a role in preparing our graduates to take their places as contributing Christian citizens. The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations describe the qualities we look for in our graduates. Each one of them is expected to be:

- A discerning believer, formed in the Catholic Faith Community
- An effective communicator
- A reflective, creative, and holistic thinker
- A self-directed, responsible, life-long learner
- A collaborative contributor
- A caring family member
- A responsible citizen

Later Starts, Shorter Lunches, Earlier Dismissals

A new school day schedule was introduced at our two high schools this September. As a result, students' 75-minute lunches are now just 40 minutes. It also means the school day starts at 9:00 a.m., instead of 8:45 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m., instead of 3:25.

"The results have been positive," says Dan Parr, Superintendent of Education. "Students have less unstructured time at

lunch, which has significantly reduced occurrences of misbehaviour. I think the later start is also positive – especially for busy teenagers who think early rising is for the birds."

The former five-period day, which was somewhat unusual, was adopted to accommodate high enrolment and a scarcity of classroom space. That's all changed now and improved facilities

have allowed for the return to a more traditional four-period day.

"Not all the students like the shorter lunch hour, but I think a lot of them do appreciate starting school a little later," says Nate Meidinger, a Grade 12 St. Mike's student. "I personally enjoy the compacted day and the fact it ends earlier, which means I can do more after school."

High Skills Options Spell Success

Every student deserves to succeed at high school, which is why the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board is currently piloting three new provincial programs that give students even more opportunities to find the right fit – and experience that success.

One of the Specialist High Skills Major programs is in Arts and Culture. Offered at St. Mike's, it gives students a combination of six or more courses and experiences, all of which relate to communications technology, art, music, media or drama. At least two of these credits are earned through co-op placement, which means students get the experience in the workplace.

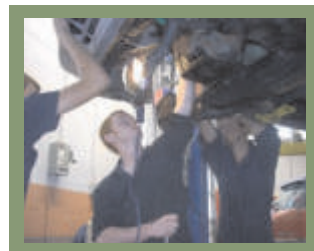
With the abundance of artistic talent in

the Festival City this initiative is a natural fit for St. Michael Secondary School. It allows students to focus on a specialized area of interest in the arts – right in their own backyard.



A second Specialist High Skills Major program being offered at St. Mike's is in construction. Employers

have already praised the high level of technical skill being demonstrated by the students enrolled in this program. St. Mike's technology students now have even more opportunities for rewarding jobs in the skilled-trades since they'll be graduating with industry recognized training and certification, as well as hands-on experience in the fields



of construction, electrical or plumbing. Thanks to continuing support from the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), and the guidance of our OYAP leader Tim Martens, close to 40 students are on their way to finding success through this program.

St. Anne's is the site of the third Specialist High Skills Major program. After successfully piloting Agricultural Technology last year, the school continues to offer this popular program. St. Anne's Principal Chris Roehrig attributes the success of the program to its relevance for the school's largely rural student population.

Many of these students are clearly focused on a future in agriculture and this program paves the way.