



# Foundations of Faith in Education



## *For Wisdom*

*(Sirach 9)*

*Lord of life, Compassionate One,  
you who speak all things into life,  
teach us your ways.*

*You have given to us,  
both male and female,  
the care and cultivation  
of the works of your hands.*

*Grant us wisdom  
that, serving you  
in truth, justice and holiness,  
we may come rejoicing  
into your presence  
on the final day  
of our earthly journey.*

## Wellington Catholic District School Board Mission Statement

*To continue to build a vibrant Catholic community committed to the celebration of each individual by fostering a love of learning, through quality educational experiences, enabling all to respond in a Christian way to the challenges of life.*

### Governing Values

- *That witnessing the Good News of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Catholic Education.*
- *That each learner is entitled to quality Catholic education.*
- *That Catholic education is a shared responsibility of home, Church, school, and community.*
- *That we are all unique and precious gifts of God.*
- *That our commitment is to foster the dignity and growth of each person in a nurturing, safe environment.*
- *That positive attitudes lead to success and happiness.*
- *That as Catholics we are called by our faith to serve others.*
- *That as an educational system we are committed to the official languages of Canada.*



## VISION

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### Philosophical/Theological Basis

We Believe:

- that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the entire educational mission of the Catholic school;
- that it is through participation in the evangelical mission of the Church that the Catholic school finds its meaning and purpose;
- that the Catholic school exists in order to assist the Church in providing students with a holistic education, including leading and guiding them to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

We Follow:

- the teachings of Holy Scripture;
- Church Tradition;
- the teachings of the Catholic Church;
- the Policy documents from the Ministry of Education and Training and the Institute for Catholic Education

We Minister:

- by being a welcoming community (inclusive community of faith, hope and love);
- by being a word-of-God community (preaching and teaching the word-of-God);
- by being a liturgical community (worshiping God through prayer and sacrament);
- by being a community of welfare (spiritual, psychological, intellectual, emotional, physical);
- by being a witnessing community (living a life based on the teachings of the Gospel and the Church).

(Groome, Thomas. *Educating For Life*. 1998.)

### The Mission of the Catholic School

*The Catholic school is an integral part of the saving mission of the Church. The Catholic school, through its educational mandate, seeks to form human persons in the image of Christ. This is possible through constant reference to the Gospel and formation of Eucharistic communities which celebrate the presence of God in both Word and sacrament. With this focus, the Catholic school retains its ecclesial identity and its purpose.*

## The Context of Our Times

### Philosophical Context

We live in a “post-modern” society. This society is characterized as a secular (Godless) one, in which many value systems (pluralism) compete for civic recognition. In such a society, Truth has been relativized, trivialized, and compromised. It is not surprising that the Gospel and the Church have been marginalised. The attack on the Gospel and the Church have paved the way for the establishment of a “culture of excess” - a culture in which power, pleasure and material prosperity (the three temptations of Christ) are substituted for spirituality and morality.

### Social Context

In this age, economic policies dictate the structure and purpose of society and, as a result, have eroded the centrality of the family as the organizational framework for community development. God chose to become incarnate in the human family. As cited in *Familiaris Consortio*, “The family finds in the plan of God...not only its identity... but also its mission.... Each family finds within itself a summons (to educate) that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility” (FC 17). As a part of the Body of Christ, the Christian family is a “Church in miniature”; indeed, a “domestic Church”(FC 21). The family is the primary faith educator of the child and, therefore, occupies an irreplaceable position as mediator of the grace of God. The “culture of excess” has afflicted much damage on the family and there are many children who are both broken and uninitiated into the life of Christ.

### Economic Context

Recently, there has been a shift in economic priorities that reflects a lack of respect for the intrinsic worth and the dignity of the human person and jeopardizes the health and welfare of millions of people, especially the poor. Capitalism, when left unbridled and at the dictates of greed, places the human person at the service of capital. Free market capitalism with its exploitive international trade agreements threatens to alter the economic patterns among human beings. Current trends toward increased privatization endanger the survival of the “universality” of many social programs. These programs contribute to the “common good” of both local and global communities. A Christian society has a Scriptural and theological basis in its concern for the poor.

### Challenges

The Catholic school finds itself at the crossroads between culture and faith. Through its doors come the faithful, the unchurched, and the uninitiated. The Catholic school, in its most mature form, constitutes both the “fertile ground” for and the centre of evangelization (*Ecclesia in America*, art. 71). While the process of evangelization is a long one, it is not readily measured by the tools of an assessment culture. The recent curriculum orientation with its exclusive focus on knowledge, skills, and assessment minimizes the moral and spiritual dimensions of the human experience. A Catholic community that is not vigilant in its defence of its priorities runs the risk of compromising its identity and mandate to the materialistic dictates of a secular culture. A Catholic community composed of faith-filled persons who seek to establish the kingdom of God in the building up of society is a beacon of hope in a moment of darkness.

### “Hope that Fulfills”

Despite the myriad challenges that face persons of faith, in this the dawning of the third millennium, hope springs eternal. We share in the heritage of all peoples who have been called and chosen to follow God’s way. Hope and covenant are intertwined in the very fabric of God’s historical relationship with persons of faith. Just as the hope of Abraham, Moses and David rested on their covenantal relationship with God, so, too, does ours depend on the everlasting covenant brought into being by the sacrifice of Christ. Our hope also rests in our children because, according to John, “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”(Jn. 1:5).

## **PRAXIS** (Practical application of the philosophical/theological basis)

### **Faith Development**

Faith development is a key component in helping the community shape its vision. A Catholic community, founded on Christ and immersed in a larger secular culture, needs to be ever aware of the forces that shape its vision. Evangelization requires knowledge, faith, and discipleship on the part of all those who are the staff of a school. It is only through ongoing faith formation that the community perfects itself in the image of Christ and transforms itself into a builder of the kingdom.

Decisions on the allocation of the resources of time and money must reflect the Bishops' imperative that "it is only through ongoing faith development that teachers (and all staff) can hope to meet the challenges of this moment" (*This Moment of Promise*. CCCB. p. 27, 1989.).

### **Curriculum**

All subject disciplines have a pedagogical integrity of their own. They must be taught in a manner which affords every student the opportunity to maximize her/his mastery of knowledge and skills; however, knowledge and skills training alone fail to address the most essential elements of a genuinely humanizing education. An education becomes truly humanizing when it addresses the spiritual, moral, and religious dimensions of the human experience as they are encountered in the curriculum. Catholic schools are essentially places of human formation. It is only through constant reference to Christ that the school becomes truly formational.

All subject disciplines contribute to the formation of the Catholic graduate by addressing the Catholic Graduate Expectations within the curriculum. When teachers teach in a holistic way, they animate the curriculum and provide students with both the knowledge and wisdom needed to live in the world as disciples of Christ.

Religious and Family Life Education programs, through their systematic study of the basic tenets of our faith, are essential to the complete faith development of the students. It must be emphasized that the teaching of such programs is not merely confined to "religious classes", and its aim is not simply intellectual assent to religious truths but also a total commitment of one's whole being to the Person of Christ (*The Catholic School*, (50), 1977.).

"Everything must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation" (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. (97), 1988.).

### **Holy Scripture**

The Church strongly and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn "the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ", by frequent reading of the Divine Scriptures. "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (133)).

The school responds to this exhortation by using Scripture for prayer, story telling, instruction, liturgy, and, most importantly, by leading students to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Holy Bible should be present in every classroom as both a symbol and source of the Word of God.

### **Sacraments**

Through Baptism we become sacramentally related to Christ. As a consequence, an understanding of the sacramental journey has profound educational implications. We become aware that being a member of the Church is something dynamic, responding to every person's need to continue growing through life. When we meet the Lord in the Sacraments, we are never left unchanged. The Holy Spirit causes us to grow in the Church, offering us "grace upon grace"; the only thing the Spirit asks is cooperation. The educational consequences of this encounter are on our relationship with God, our witness as Christians and our choice of a personal vocation (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. (79), 1988.).

### **Religious Symbols**

"From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics...in a Catholic school, everyone should be aware of the living presence of Jesus the "Master"...the Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational climate. Crucifixes in the school will remind everyone of this familiar and moving presence of Jesus, the "Master" and "model teacher", who gave his most complete and sublime teaching from the cross" (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* . (25), 1988.).

In addition to the above, each school enriches its climate when it displays in prominent locations images of Mary. Mary, the first disciple, reminds us of our calling to faith and obedience as followers of Christ.

Each school should celebrate the life of its patron. Where that patron is a saint, students need to see how her/his response to the Gospel call of love and freedom transformed an ordinary life into a holy one. When a school displays images of its patron, it affords students a reference point for the contemplation of a life infused with the glory of God.

When the Church (school community) celebrates the memorials of martyrs and other saints during the annual cycle, she proclaims the Paschal mystery in those "who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1173)). A school needs to keep in harmony with the seasons of life. On one level, attaining such harmony is as simple as reflecting the seasons of nature. Nature itself is a powerful metaphor for life, death, and resurrection. On another level, the school is called to reflect the liturgical seasons of the year. The use of liturgical symbols and colours will remind students of their religious, spiritual, and sacramental heritage and convey that liturgy is not something relegated only to the Sabbath. When displaying these, the school commemorates the life, death and resurrection of Christ and brings the spiritual life of the school community into harmony with that of the Church.

#### **Prayer**

Prayer is a response to the presence of God in our midst - God present in our students and in our colleagues. Prayer is a vehicle for Christian communication with the Lord. The Catholic school should be a center for prayer. In all its forms: personal, communal, formal and informal; all its types: praise, petition, thanksgiving, and repentance, prayer is both an individual and communal relationship with God. Students become aware of the healing and mystical power of prayer when it is modeled by members of the community. Every effort should be made to make the prayer life of the school enriching, life-giving, and celebratory.

"The *catechesis* of children, young people, and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on the Word of God in personal prayer, practising it in liturgical prayer and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life...The memorization of basic prayers offers an essential support to the life of prayer, but it is important to help learners savour their meaning" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, (2688)).

To this end, the school can enhance the prayer life of both the student and the community by establishing and maintaining places favourable for prayer. These places may be in the form of prayer tables, grottos, centers, or chapels and should contain Holy Scripture and icons which enhance the sacredness of the space.

#### **Retreats**

Jesus often took time to withdraw, to "re-treat", to reflect, and to rest. He also invited his followers to come with him to rest (Mt. 12: 28-29). The retreat program of the school (staff and student) is an essential part of the school curriculum. It is too easy to get caught up in the demands placed upon administration, staff, and students and feel that there is no time for reflection, contemplation and prayer. Yet, without taking time for such practices, persons of faith can lose their centeredness and perspective. Taking time to "re-treat" is "re-creative" and holistic so that, if the school is called to form whole persons, then everyone needs to take time to grow in holiness herself/himself.

#### **Voluntary Service**

The mission of the Catholic school is lived out in all its educational endeavours. Involvement in voluntary activities in the spirit of generosity and service is one form of Christian witness that educators model for their students. Voluntary activities offer the teachers and students a means of deepening their relationship with one another and opportunities to live out the Gospel message beyond the school walls. When students participate in such activities, each student's education is further enhanced. It must be recognized that voluntary service needs to be kept in balance with family, professional, and life demands.



## VOCATION

A profession transforms itself into a vocation when it professes Truth. A vocation is a life lived out in a profession which responds to the calling of God. Just as God called out to Moses in Midian, so, too, does God call out to us, at this time and place, to set his children free. When we speak on behalf of God, we profess the Truth. To speak on behalf of God is to be prophetic, which requires both sacrifice and character on the part of all educators. Catholic Education, in Ontario, would not exist today except for the sacrifices and character of those who went before us, especially those religious persons who established and maintained Catholic education against 'all the odds.'

### Students

Students are called to live lives of vocation. Their vocations are embedded within the secular life and culture of the external world and the spiritual life and developmental tasks of the inner world. The life path of the human person has been described as a journey and the journey of our students includes the call to full Christian maturity. The Institute for Catholic Education has identified seven overall expectations of the Catholic School Graduate which serve as guideposts on their journey of faith formation.

### Vision Of The Learner

The Catholic graduate is expected to be:

- a discerning believer formed in the Catholic faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mystery of God's presence through word, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living;
- an effective communicator who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively, responding critically in light of gospel values;
- a reflective, creative and holistic thinker who solves problems and makes responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good;
- a self-directed, responsible, life long learner who develops and demonstrates this God-given potential;
- a collaborative contributor who finds meaning, dignity, and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good;
- a caring family member who attends to family, school, parish, and the wider community;
- a responsible citizen who gives witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting, peace, justice, and the sacredness of human life.

Students are called to discern the voice of God in a "culture of excess." They are also being called upon to speak and witness in God's name.

### Parents

Parents are the primary faith educators of their children. The Bishops of Ontario encourage them to take their own faith development as seriously as they take that of their children. They also invite them to become more involved in shaping educational policies and directions-particularly those dealing with religious and family life education programs, personal development courses, and child and day care programs (This Moment of Promise. CCCB. pg. 24, 1989.).

Parents are encouraged to become more involved in the life of the school. Opportunities exist for involvement in school councils, parent-teacher associations, field trips, and programs assisting teachers, principals, secretaries and custodial staff. Their presence strengthens the bonds between home, school, and parish.

### Teachers

"It is a sacred privilege and an awesome responsibility to be an educator. And it may be the closest we have to a universal human vocation" (Groome, Thomas. Educating for Life).

"The teacher is in an excellent position to guide the pupil to a deepening of his (*her*) faith and to enrich and enlighten his (*her*) human knowledge with the data of the faith" (the Catholic School. (40), 1977).

The responsibilities and burdens placed upon a Catholic teacher exceed those in non-religious settings. Not only is the teacher responsible for all the secular duties of teaching, as mandated by the Ministry of Education, but also, he/she is responsible for the evangelical mission of the school.

"The vocation of every Catholic educator includes the work of ongoing social development: to form men and women who will be ready to take their places in society, preparing them in such a way that they will make the kind of social commitment which will enable them to work for the improvement of social structures, making these structures in conformity with the principles of the Gospel. Thus, they will form human beings who will make human society more peaceful, fraternal, and communitarian...The Catholic educator, in other words, must be committed to the task of forming men and women who will make the "civilization of love" a reality" (Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith" (19), 1982.).

In order to fulfill these responsibilities, the Catholic teacher needs professional preparation in the basic principles of pedagogy, but, even more importantly, he/she needs adequate preparation in theology, in particular, Scripture and catechetics.

Teachers who are well prepared and full of Christian wisdom do more than convey a sense of what they are teaching to their pupils. Over and above what is said, they guide their pupils beyond mere words to the heart of total Truth (the Catholic School. (41), 1977.).

**Pastoral Staff**

Religious Education and Family Life Coordinators and Consultants, Faith Formation Consultants, Coordinators of Program, Religion Department Heads, and those directly involved in pastoral ministry, namely Chaplains and Pastoral Care Personnel, play a vital role in the “how” of Christian Catholic living within schools and school systems. These positions require people who are faith-filled, theologically educated, and pastorally skilled (Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul-Successful Practices. 2000.).

The role of chaplaincy is critical to the mission of the school. It is a role that could be characterized as being both sponsorial and responsorial in its nature. In the sponsorial dimension, a chaplain is called to assist the principal in the animation of the spiritual life of the school. In this sense, he/she is an initiator, creator, leader, and facilitator. In the responsorial dimension, the chaplain responds to the spiritual needs of the community. In this sense, he/she is a listener, counselor, advocate, and mentor.

Coordinators of Program contribute in many ways to the pastoral dimension of Catholic Education. In their position of leadership, they educate, shepherd, and guide staff toward a fuller participation in the Church’s mission for Catholic Education. The nature of their position requires of them pastoral skills which recognize the realities of the demands of teaching and evangelizing with the call to form students in the image of Christ.

Religion Department Heads are called to witness the pastoral dimension of ministry within both the school and community. They are often sought out by staff and students, for counseling, advice and assistance. By virtue of their position, they are called to be models of transformative power of Christ’s message of hope, love, and compassion.

**Unit Presidents**

Unit presidents have a special vocation by virtue of their elected position as leaders in their local units. In many ways, due to the collegial nature of their positions, they can be influential in establishing both the conditions and atmosphere required to move members toward fuller communion with the vocational dimension of their ministry. In order to meet the demands, they need to be models of ongoing faith development for colleagues.

“Unit presidents serve as leaders within the Catholic education community in a variety of ways. The best known of these ventures is collective bargaining. What is not known is the work unit presidents do to promote the principles of Catholic education and to defend the constitutional rights of the Catholic school system within the province. As well, they work for the professional growth of their colleagues and the improvement of their working conditions as directed by the social teaching of the Church...Much like [those] they serve, unit presidents require opportunities to develop their leadership skills and

knowledge, especially in these changing times”(Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul-Successful Practices. 2000.).

**Principals and Vice-Principals**

Principals and vice principals have the unique opportunity to create the character of their respective schools. Their reach extends both into the classroom and into the community. The life, the values, and the [climate] of each school derive in large part from the commitment of principals and vice-principals to their staff, students, and the gospel (This Moment of Promise. CCCB pg. 27, 1989.).

“Principals and vice principals serve not only as board administrators but also as religious and spiritual leaders. These unique roles point to the need for ongoing professional learning in the areas of faith development, spirituality, and distinctive pedagogical features associated with the delivery of curriculum based on a Catholic educational world view”(Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul-Successful Practices. 2000.).

“The leadership of Catholic school administrators should be marked by:

- a willingness to accept responsibility from the Catholic community and to exercise leadership within the community;
- a deep commitment to evangelization and life-long faith development;
- a collegial style that seeks to empower staff and students;
- the ability to bring people together to foster reconciliation when needed;
- persistence in encouraging a communal discernment of the working of the Holy Spirit;
- sensitivity to the needs and hopes of the families and students;
- commitment to ensuring understanding and cooperation between Church and school;
- openness to collaboration with clergy.”

(Fulfilling the Promise: The Challenge of Leadership. Pg. 5, 1993).

**Senior Administration**

“Efforts to champion a distinctive Catholic character to the mission of Catholic schools can often be lost amidst the pragmatic and secular realities of funding envelopes, board reports, and staffing models”(Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul-Successful Practices. 2000.).

Those who work in the position of senior administrative leadership are advantageously located to influence the vision and direction of each of their system’s schools.

**continued...**

## VOCATION (continued)

"Too often their time and energy are taken up with issues of governance and finance rather than those of community and program, especially in discussion concerning budget, personnel, and resources" (Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul- Successful Practices. 2000).

Above and beyond the tasks and responsibilities of administration comes the call to formation in Christian maturity. Such maturity requires commitment to the Catholic faith, as well as, personal faith development. Senior administrators are called to witness a style of leadership that reflects Christ's model of service. This spirit of service is characterized by humility, unselfishness, love, forgiveness, justice, charity, and compassion.

### Support Staff

The character of a Catholic school is not consigned to any one group. The formation of students takes place within the larger school community. The interactions between students and support staff are valuable in assisting young people to see that Christ's call to discipleship is for all people.

The Bishops of Ontario recognize the importance of the role of support staff and they state:

secretaries, building custodians and other support personnel are an integral part of the Catholic educational effort. In the day-to-day life of a school, they provide the services which are complementary to those engaged in teaching or administration. The spirit with which they carry out their service should be a Christian witness to all those who are in contact with them. What they do and how they do it may speak as much to the students about living the gospel as anything that they will hear in the classroom. There is no such thing as 'just a job' in a Catholic school. There are only various forms of service, each calling for extraordinary dedication (This Moment of Promise. CCCB.1989.).

This calling to true discipleship requires that "support staff need opportunities to deepen and nurture their spiritual lives, especially in relation to their role as ambassadors of Catholic education" (Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul- Successful Practices. 2000.).

### Clergy and Religious

The clergy and religious have been most directly responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the Catholic educational system. Their vision and selfless service are responsible for the structure and form of Catholic education in the province as it exists today. Their continued presence in the Catholic educational system is essential to the protection of the heritage of Catholic education as it has been passed down through the generations.

The Bishops of Ontario affirm that ...their involvement in the faith development, social outreach, and liturgical celebrations in a school will benefit both the parish and the school. Through their priestly ministry, the sacramental life of the Church can signify and make

present the mysteries of faith which gather together to sustain a Catholic education community. Our faith is not only something to be learned, it is also a mystery to be celebrated (This Moment of Promise. CCCB.1989.).

### Trustees

At the root of the word 'trustee' is the concept of trust. Trustees are entrusted, by the Catholic community, to guide the system in accordance with the traditions that respect the distinctiveness of Catholic education and with the vigilance necessary to combat the mounting forces of secularization that view education as merely a means to form "economic individuals". This is an appreciable challenge and requires a commitment to faith development on the part of each trustee.

In the long run, their service as trustees will be as effective as the extent to which they are willing to be continually educated in the faith. This will provide them with the depth and vision necessary to make the role a noble political task. By working to create the necessary economic and social conditions, they make Catholic education possible (This Moment of Promise. CCCB.1989.).

### Catholic School Councils

The Catholic school system has survived in Ontario due to the collaborative efforts of all of its members throughout its history. Without the collaboration of clergy, religious, trustees, students, teachers, parents, taxpayers, business, politicians, and our French brothers and sisters, there is little doubt that we would not enjoy the rights and privileges of a publicly funded system.

Catholic school councils can be envisioned as an extension of the collaboration that our system has enjoyed. As such, it is important to recognize that the operative model is membership in the mystical body of Christ. The 'corporatization' of the educational agenda threatens to undermine the nature of the Catholic dynamic of membership and replace it with a business model.

Parents form an important part of the school community, but in a corporate culture they may view themselves as clients of the system. It is important "to change the attitudes of parents from being clients of the school to an understanding of themselves as vital and necessary members of the school community" (Involving Other Parents: The Primary Focus of a Catholic School Council. Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, 1999.).

The Catholic school council operates from a basis that regards education as a process that engages the whole child within the context of her/his membership within the Catholic community.

"The success of school councils in this regard depends in part on relationships and the creation of a positive working environment which sustains common educational purpose. At the heart of this common purpose is a recognition that religious literacy and faith formation are distinct features of learning for publicly funded Catholic schools" (Ontario Catholic Education: Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul- Successful Practices.2000).

## COMMUNITY

### Home, Parish, School and Society

The community educates as it transcends its own material identity to become part of the mystical body of Christ. In the words of Christ, “whenever two or more are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them” (Mt.18:20). A community of persons has an exceedingly complex interpersonal dynamic. The culture of the school is an outgrowth of the personal life, faith, and lived experience of all its members. The culture of the school results from the dynamic interaction of the spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and intellectual contributions of persons who make up the school community. The culture of a Catholic school community is one of love. All the gifts and talents of people within the school community contribute to the building up of a Christian community of love. In the early Church, it was said of the Christian community: “See how they love one another.” The school community today is the place where we learn to live out Jesus’ commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt. 22:39).

The school community is a microcosm of the larger Catholic community. Within the school community, students enter into relationships with its members. In its most mature form, the atmosphere of the school community is permeated by the beatitudes. This transforms the essence of relating from individualism and competition, which lead to alienation, to community and collaboration, which lead to belonging. This is the intangible dimension of the Catholic school that calls students toward a mature Christian life ethic and thus educates in the truest sense of the word.

“Either implicit or explicit reference to a determined attitude to life (*Weltanschauung*) is unavoidable in education because it comes into every decision that is made. It is, therefore, essential, if for no other reason than for unity of teaching, that each member of the school community, albeit with differing degrees of awareness, adopts a common vision, a common outlook on life, based on an adherence to a scale of values in which he(*she*) believes” (*The Catholic School* 1977).

What better model could there be for discipleship and communal living than the Gospel of John? John calls all Christians to belief in Jesus and to life in the Holy Spirit. The ethos of John’s community is that of love. John’s world view was counter-cultural and resulted in the community breaking the social bonds of its time. This was a community led by the Spirit which publicly testified to its belief in Jesus. John’s Gospel invites all Christians to establish communities founded on the love that Christ has for us and to create a “civilization of love” by working for the common good.

Communities of love are rooted in the discourse of Jesus as the real vine (Jn.15). A recognition of Jesus as the vine and us as the branches should underscore the beliefs of the community. First of all, we are called to believe that we draw our life from Jesus. Secondly, all members are equal as we are all created in the image of God. Thirdly, we are all called to bear fruit by witnessing and testifying to Jesus our redeemer.

In addition, the story of the washing of the feet (Jn.13) calls all disciples to lives of service. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he demonstrated that God’s way inverts the political, economic, and social hierarchies of our time. We need to be attentive to the voice of Jesus as it is spoken by those who humbly offer the greatest service. Communities dedicated to service have open dialogue with all their members and value each for her/his contributions.

“The more the members of the educational community develop a real willingness to collaborate among themselves, the more fruitful their work will be. Achieving the educational aims of the school should be an equal priority for [clergy, religious, administrators, support staff, community partners], teachers, students and families alike, each one according to his or her role, always in the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. Therefore, channels of communication should be open among all those concerned with the school” (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. 39, 1988).





Wellington Catholic  
District School Board  
*We Have Faith in Education*

August 2001