



***Educating People of Character* Inservice Guide**

Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, 2007

The following pages will help introduce staff to the meaning of Character Education in our Catholic school board. The three resources to be drawn on in the pages that follow are:

- *Renfrew County Catholic Schools: Educating People of Character*,
- The Ontario Ministry of Education's *Finding common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*
- The experience and expertise of staff.

Affirming who we are, with openness to the future

This inservice seeks to affirm the unique role of staff in shaping the character of our Catholic schools. Whether in or outside the classroom, our activities and witness make a lasting contribution to the knowledge, skills and values our students bring to the world. As we begin to envision the shape of Ministry-mandated *Character Education* in our board system, it is good for us to recognize what is best in our tradition and practice, and to celebrate it. In so doing, we can build character education initiatives with an authenticity that reflects the mission for which our schools were founded.

Suggestions for format

The suggested format for this inservice guide is a *discussion among colleagues*, where each can freely contribute to the conversation at their own comfort level. Here are some ideas as to how that might take place:

- A staff may wish to take an entire meeting to work through all the questions and reflections as a group.
- Others may wish to divide questions up for small group discussion, followed by a report back to the larger group.
- Some staffs may opt to bring this guide home to review on their own, and perhaps come together at a set date to share their reflections.

Proclaiming our Identity and Mission with Relevance and Precision

In many ways then, the Character Education initiative is challenging us as Catholic schools to proclaim our distinctive identity and mission with greater relevance and precision. This is nothing less than what the Church is called to do in its own pastoral planning in every age. Thus,

[i]t is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium. But it must be translated into *pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community*. (John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 29)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Educating the Whole Person*

A quality education is not only geared toward the intellect, but also toward attitudes, behaviours and dispositions. It emphasizes all aspects of the self and domains of learning – the cognitive, affective, attitudinal and behavioural. It is about the education of the whole person. Character development, which encompasses all these domains, therefore becomes a fundamental goal of education in Ontario. Finding Common Ground, p. 2)

Catholic schools educate the character of the whole person: physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Our unique mandate allows us to provide students with quality instruction that reinforces a vision of life rooted in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. (Educating People of Character, Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, 2007)

Please take a moment to discuss some of the ways you and your colleagues contribute to the task of educating students...

- Physically
- Intellectually
- Socially
- Spiritually

2. *Knowledge in the Service of Love*

Character development is:

- *A primary responsibility of parents and families*
- *A cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society*
- *A foundation of our publicly funded education system.*
(Finding Common Ground, p. i)

While promoting knowledge, skills and abilities, we stress the importance of witnessing a life of faith through commitment to the worshipping community, to family and civic responsibility. We encourage young people's self-discovery through Christ-like self-giving love and service to others. (Educating People of Character)

Please take a moment to share some of the ways you support...

- Parents in their role as first instructors in faith and values to their children.
- Society, by imparting values and affirming behaviours which contribute to the common good.
- The school community, through your activities with students.

3. The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations: Values and Attitudes Defining the Character of Catholic Education

Character development is not a new curriculum. Neither is it an add-on. It is embedded in all that we do in schools. It is intentionally infused in our policies, programs and interactions. (Finding Common Ground, p. i)

Fifty-two core Catholic Graduate Expectations (CGEs) are embedded in everything we do in Ontario's Catholic school curriculum. The CGEs embody the Gospel values at the heart of Catholic education, and portray the ideal characteristics of young men and women graduating from our schools.

(Educating People of Character)

Please take a few minutes to share some examples of how our school curriculum and activities reflect the following CGE arenas:

- *A Discerning Believer Formed in the Catholic Faith Community*
- *An Effective Communicator*
- *A Reflective, Creative, and Holistic Thinker*
- *A Self-directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner*
- *A Collaborative Contributor*
- *A Caring Family Member*
- *A Responsible Citizen*

4. Religious and Family Life Education

The principles and attributes of character development are universal and transcend racial, ethno-cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, physical and intellectual ability. (Finding Common Ground, p. i)

Our Religious Education and Family Life programs are the heart of our Catholic school curriculum. They provide students with a perspective and direction to orient their entire lives and the world around them to the values of the Gospel.

(Educating People of Character)

Please take a moment to reflect with colleagues on the role that Religious Education and Family Life programs in your division play in forming a vision in students that

- transcends apparent differences, and
- encourages them to bring unity and harmony to the world around them and beyond.

5. *Catholic Education's Dual Mandate: A Distinctive Catholic Curriculum*

Catholic schools...have been founded on the basis of inculcating Catholic values and have programs in place that nurture the academic, social, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of their students. Historically, Catholic education has stressed community involvement as an important means for students to put beliefs into practice. (Finding Common Ground, p. 4))

Our distinctive curriculum helps foster a world view shaped by the Catholic understanding of life's meaning and purpose. We invite students to draw on the Catholic faith tradition to form a critical analysis of the arts, media and technology. At the same time, we help them claim their role as global stewards, cherishing the environment, and promoting reverence for God's gift of human life at all stages. (Educating People of Character)

Please take a few moments to discuss and share how your school curriculum and activities help students to

- Reflect critically on the arts, media and use of technology
- Become better stewards of creation
- Respect God's gift of human life at all stages

6. *Our Pursuit of Lifelong Learning*

Character development must be a whole school effort with the expectation that all members of staff will be committed to its effective implementation and will model, teach and expect demonstrations of the attributes in all school, classroom and extra-curricular activities. (Finding Common Ground, p. i)

We encourage staff to nurture their faith life, and to further their education on a continuous basis –through prayer, reading, study and professional upgrading. We support one another's efforts to become familiar with the Catholic Church's Social Teaching, and to challenge the consumer culture with lives dedicated to justice in the spirit of the Gospel. (Educating People of Character)

Please take a few moments to consider and share with someone what you consider to be the impact of your own life-long learning and witness on the character of...

- the students you teach
- your school

7. *Servant Leadership After the Example of Jesus*

Teachers will:

- *Model the character attributes agreed upon by the board based community consultation process and exemplified in the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession.*

All staff will:

- *Model the character attributes agreed upon by the community in their workplace practices and interactions with others.*
(Finding Common Ground, p.8)

We strive to model a servant leadership style that follows the example of Jesus and helps every student and staff reach their God-given potential. As servant leaders, we promote board policies which seek to ensure the safety of all students with school environments characterized by warmth, hospitality, good humour and joy. (Educating People of Character)

Please take a few moments to share examples of how servant leadership has made a difference in the life of your school.

8. *Our Vision*

Our vision for the province is one that promotes excellence in academic achievement and the best of what it means to be human. As Ontario strives to provide the best possible education, there is a need to re-commit ourselves to the central mission of schooling – namely, to transmit from one generation to the next the habits of mind and heart that are necessary for good citizenship to thrive. To this end, we recognize that character development, which goes hand in hand with a strong academic program, is a natural extension of these efforts.
(Finding Common Ground, p.2)

INSPIRED BY OUR RICH HERITAGE AND CHALLENGED BY THE STRUGGLES OF OUR PAST, WE ARE AN INCLUSIVE CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY CALLED TO EXPRESS OUR MISSION AS CHURCH TO PASS ON THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST, TO MAKE IT RELEVANT IN THE WORLD TODAY, AND TO BE THE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. (RCCDSB Vision Statement)

Please take a few moments to comment on one part of our vision statement. You are invited to reflect on how this part of our vision statement brings out *the best of what it means to be human*, and contributes to good citizenship among our students, graduates and staff.

- A Rich Heritage
- Challenges and Blessings
- An Inclusive Catholic community
- Sharing in the Church's Evangelizing Mission
- A Relevant Message for Today's World
- Hope for the Future

9. *Further Discussion*

Finally, you are invited to take a few moments to discuss how the Ministry of Education's current *Character Education* initiative...

- affirms what is being done in your school, and
- challenges us to make the values that guide Catholic education even clearer in our school(s).