Renewing The Promise
A Pastoral Letter
for Catholic Education

Renewing the Promise
Reflection Resource for Catholic School Boards
1. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

*Renewing the Promise*

*A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*

It seems natural to ask the question, what is the promise that we are called to renew? In the Old Testament, we are given the promise of God’s enduring and unconditional love. In the New Testament we are reminded of God’s love for us, and Jesus’ promise that he will be with us always, to the end of the age. Pope Benedict explains it in this way. “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by an encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.” Within the context of Catholic education, the promise is that this true encounter with Jesus can and does take place, each and every day, within our Catholic schools. Together, we commit to renew that promise as we work together to strengthen our Catholic schools as communities that exemplify, in word and deed, the Good News of Jesus Christ. (P. 4)

- How do we help our Catholic schools continue to be places where Jesus is encountered each day?

- How can we help “strengthen our Catholic schools as communities that exemplify, in word and deed, the Good News of Jesus Christ.”?
2. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**The Road to Emmaus**

On the day of our Lord’s Resurrection, two disciples are leaving Jerusalem travelling to Emmaus. How are they to interpret what they have experienced over the previous three days? Along the road, they encounter Jesus; however, they do not recognize him. He initiates a conversation by asking them what they were talking about. This allows them to share their sadness and confusion. Jesus is quite direct in his response to these disciples, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe…” Jesus offers to accompany them on their journey. They invite Jesus to stay with them for a meal. As they gather together around the table, it is in the “breaking of the bread” that their eyes are opened and they recognize him. After he vanishes from their sight, they say to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us on the road, when he was opening the scriptures to us?” On fire with the love of God, they return to Jerusalem to share the Good News with the other disciples.

Jesus encounters and accompanies the disciples in this Gospel story. We are reminded that He is always present in our lives. Walking alongside the disciples, Jesus engages them in dialogue and in teaching, and in doing so, nurtures their relationship. Jesus restores the joy of believing in the hearts of these disciples by revealing himself in the breaking of the bread and through his enduring presence, friendship, and unconditional love. Our Christ-centred Catholic schools have the ability to offer the same experience of inviting joyful discipleship for staff, students, and families. (p. 5.)

- Where have you seen students “on fire with the love of God” who “share the Good News with ...other disciples.”?

- How does our parish/home/school partnership invite “joyful discipleship for staff, students and families.”?
3. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

### A Community That Accompanies

Jesus established the Church to be missionary and we share in that mission through the gift of baptism. In this sacrament, we are given the great commission to go forth, infused with the divine virtues of faith, hope and love, and make disciples by witnessing to Christ and his Gospel.

Catholic schools are communities of accompaniment where the story of our salvation is known and shared, offering the encouragement that comes from knowing that Jesus walks with us. In addition to being places of teaching and learning, Catholic schools live the Emmaus experience as they witness to the Risen Lord. (P. 7)

- **Baptism’s gifts of faith, hope and love empower us to live as witnesses to Christ’s Gospel.** What are some of the ways we help staff and students nurture a climate of faith, hope and love in our Catholic schools?

- **How do we as members of our Catholic school communities *accompany* others and encourage their witness to Jesus’ abiding presence in their journey?**
4. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**A Community That Builds Relationships**

Catholic schools are places where the 'New Evangelization' can take root by inviting students and their families into a deeper relationship with Christ. The experience of community within the school can gently fan the embers until they burst into a flame of faith. (p. 8)

The work of Catholic schools involves initiating, facilitating and maintaining trusting relationships with and among the Catholic educational partners. A sense of respect for the unique expertise and strengths of each and generous cooperation that acknowledges and celebrates the accomplishments of all is essential to develop the mutual trust that nurtures effective working relationships.

The analogy of St. Paul is helpful; there is one body, but many parts. They need one another and must work together in harmony, “that there be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” (1Cor 12:25) Just as all the parts must work together to ensure a healthy body, so too must all the educational partners collaborate and rely upon one another in order to ensure that Catholic education remains healthy and strong. (p. 9.)

- What are the “trusting relationships” you help facilitate and maintain within your Catholic parish-home-school community?

- Where do you see efforts to build deeper relationship with Christ in your Catholic school, parish and community? How can we help fan the embers of these efforts into a flame?
5. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**A Community That Encourages Engagement and Instils Hope**

Pope Francis also reminds us that to be formed in the faith is not simply to be able to profess it on our lips, we must also live it with love; faith works through love. This calls us to avoid the false dichotomy between those who think that the primary focus of Catholic education is faith formation and those who think it is to witness to justice. The truth is that we cannot say one is more important than the other because we need both in order to be faithful to Christ and his teaching.

To know the faith means living the faith: “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6,8) Catholic schools are places where staff and students are encouraged both to enter into scripture, doctrine and worship, and are invited to actively express their faith through acts of love toward their neighbours. (P. 11)

- Where do you see faith expressed in works of love in your Catholic school?

- Who are the “neighbours” most in need of concrete expressions of faith through love in our Catholic school communities? How do we strive to meet their needs?
6. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**A Community That Forms Joyful Disciples**

As faithful disciples of Jesus, we celebrate God’s joy which longs to break into the world. After the disciples encounter the Risen Lord, they are filled with great joy and they are excited to share it with others. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis speaks about the joy that comes from Christ, “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.” The joy of believing is manifest in the hearts and lives of those who faithfully follow the Lord. Catholic schools play an important role in proclaiming the joy of believing. Pope Francis states, “Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture.”

Our Catholic schools help to form joyful disciples as hearts and minds are opened to the transforming love of God and to the flame of faith in action. On a daily basis, Catholic schools demonstrate the joy of believing and witness the Good News to the communities that they serve. (P. 13)

- **How does the joy of believing in Christ help our young people live for more than just the short-lived rewards of a social media culture?**

- **Where do we see the love of God and flame of faith in action transforming our Catholic school communities?**
7. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

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**Renewing the Promise**

The first pastoral letter on Catholic education in Ontario, “This Moment of Promise” (1989), established a clear and compelling mission and vision for Catholic schools following the historical legislative decision that resulted in the extension of funding for Ontario’s Catholic school systems. A second pastoral letter, “Fulfilling the Promise” (1993) focused on the importance of leadership in our shared mission to nurture and sustain Catholic schools.

Three decades later, our context may have changed profoundly, but our mission has not; Catholic schools are places where children and young people may find solid and enduring values to give hope, meaning and purpose to life through an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship, and the certain knowledge of God’s unwavering love for us, provides a firm place to stand in shifting times. The promise is that this true encounter with Jesus can and does take place, each and every day, within our Catholic schools. Together, we renew that promise by continuing to strengthen our Catholic schools as communities that exemplify the Good News of Jesus in word and in deed.

As your bishops, we are leaders entrusted to teach so that all will grow in holiness, and shepherds called to accompany our flock on the journey. (P. 15)

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- Where do we see the promised encounter with Jesus taking place in our Catholic schools?

- What are some practical things we can do to renew and strengthen the promise of this encounter together as schools, parents and clergy, together with our shepherds?
8. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students:</th>
<th>Parents:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus knows you perfectly, and loves you without limits. He is always at your side, encouraging you and helping you to be the best that you can be as you offer your service to the world as an instrument of peace and justice. Both your local parish and your Catholic school community are places to encounter Jesus, and to know him more deeply. He is a kind and wise teacher and a wonderful healer of all your hurts, who will bring you peace and joy. Never forget to love him and worship him. (P. 16)</td>
<td>God has gifted you with children and you are their first and most important educators. Yours is the task to immerse them in the unconditional love of God found in Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus heard the words of his Heavenly Father at his Baptism, share these words with your sons or daughters: “You are my beloved child in whom I delight!” Your parish community and your Catholic school are there to support you in caring for and nurturing your children. Work with the school community to help your child realize the gifts they have been given by our Creator God. School councils are opportunities for faith formation and collaboration, where parents and school staff learn from each other, pray together, and work alongside each other to ensure all children have opportunities to grow in faith and in their learning. (P. 16)</td>
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- Can you name a time when you’ve seen Jesus reaching out to bring healing, and filling our young people with His peace and joy in your Catholic parish-home-school community?

- Are there new ways our schools can collaborate with parents to “ensure all children have opportunities to grow in faith and in their learning”?
9. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**Renewing the Promise** (cont’d)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teachers and Education Workers:</th>
<th>Support Staff:</th>
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<tr>
<td>You are powerful witnesses to the presence of Jesus in the lives of our students, and you provide the good soil each school day for the roots of faith to grow in our students. Remember that Jesus was a great teacher. In prayer, allow him to inspire you by his example of loving service, and ask him to support you in your chosen vocation. Allow the pattern of the Eucharist to guide you as you serve children and families. Each day provide a welcoming environment as students arrive to school. Listen to their stories, and help them discover the connection between the larger biblical story that forms us as Christians, and their own lived experience. Create inclusive places of learning that invite and enable each child and young person in your care to grow fully to be all that God knows and hopes them to be. (P. 17)</td>
<td>The important role you play in the Catholic school community is too often taken for granted. Each day you offer loving service to those who depend upon you. Yours is the voice of welcome to our parent community. You are the stewards of our physical space and facilities; without your diligence, hard work and attention to detail, our offices and classrooms would be less welcoming. Each of you bring unique expertise, skill and talents that contribute to the creation of learning communities that are places of warmth and welcome. From the scriptures we know that Jesus welcomed children, and your work, alongside educators, to care for children, helps our Catholic schools to fulfill their mission. Your model of service and generosity of spirit offers important witness to the values of the Gospel message. (P. 19)</td>
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- Please name a time when you saw a teacher/education worker witnessing in words or actions to the love of Christ for students.

- How can we encourage our support staff’s continued important contributions to the distinctive atmosphere of our Catholic school – through their welcome, service and Gospel witness?
10. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**Principals, Vice Principals:**
As school leaders you carry responsibility for all aspects of your school. In addition to your role managing a safe and efficient learning environment and leading the instructional efforts of your staff, your attention to the spiritual and cultural dimension of a Catholic school is an essential part of your mission, and provides inspiration and support for all members of the school community. As leaders of schools, cultivate a Eucharistic sensibility. Let the pattern of the Eucharist guide you as you help to shape and animate a Catholic school culture where the love of God is found in an encounter with Christ Jesus: gather your school community, tell the story, break the bread, and help to bring hope to the world. Together with staff, ensure that it is an environment of welcome and hospitality. Model for your staff how best to minister to children and young people. Listen to the stories they tell and witness to them the stories of our faith and of your own faith journey. (P. 19)

- Describe an instance when you witnessed an administrator modeling qualities of Christian leadership described above, in your Catholic school.

- What can we do as members of the parish-home-school community to support the leadership they are called to provide in our Catholic schools?
11. Please read the quotes below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

<table>
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<th>Trustees:</th>
<th>Directors and Supervisory Officers:</th>
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<td>You are entrusted with the profound responsibility of stewardship of the mission of Catholic education. Let the Gospel of Jesus guide your policies and your governance of our Catholic school districts, for in his Gospel the Church discovers truth, goodness and beauty.</td>
<td>You are called to model a life centred in the person of Jesus, and privileged to give witness, personally and professionally, to the teachings of Christ as you offer your leadership in the service of others. Both the opportunity and the responsibility to create communities of faith in our schools and in our administrative offices are in your hands. Your words and your actions inspire and influence the efforts of all those who work in our Catholic schools. Your words describe the vision, set the tone, and inspire the actions of all those who share this work. Let your voice speak with love and respect, and reflect compassion and understanding.</td>
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<td>Your effectiveness is best determined by the extent to which you allow your faith, your love of God and your compassion and respect for one another, to inform your decisions. Pray together; work closely with your local bishop and diocesan staff who can offer support and guidance as you seek to grow in your faith, and deepen your knowledge and understanding of Church teaching.</td>
<td>Let your actions match your words, guiding and animating communities, rooted in our Catholic faith, that invite students, staff, and families to encounter Jesus each day, as we accompany one another. (P. 20-21)</td>
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<td>Let your public actions be a visible sign of what we profess as a Catholic community, and an expression of God’s love and mercy in this world. (P. 20)</td>
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- What are some of the difficult decisions our trustees have to make to ensure that our Catholic schools remain true to their mission?

- Where do you see the influence of our Director and Superintendents’ faith impacting the way we function as Catholic schools?
12. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**Clergy and Pastoral Teams:**

Catholic schools are an integral part of the Catholic Church’s mission. The relationship that exists between home, school and parish is of vital importance to Catholic education today. Our Catholic schools present a tremendous opportunity for the ‘new evangelization,’ and can be a powerful tool in helping you to connect with students and families. In this regard, your words of encouragement and support, your ministry of presence whenever possible, your invitation for all to engage in the life of the parish community — these are an important and necessary part of the ministry of the local parish. The Catholic school community, like the Church itself, is ever in need of evangelization and conversion. Your partnership with our schools and your ministry to them has long been a foundation for the success of Catholic education in the province of Ontario, and continues to be critical to the success of our shared mission. (P. 21)

- Please name some of the contributions that clergy and pastoral teams make to the life of your school.

- How can we encourage our clergy’s continued evangelizing ministry of presence and support in our Catholic schools?
13. Please read the quote below from *Renewing the Promise* and discuss the questions, with someone recording responses at your table.

**The Breaking of the Bread**

It has been said that the Eucharist is the most beautiful thing this side of heaven because we encounter Jesus Christ the Risen Lord just as those disciples did so many years ago; Jesus comes to ‘walk with us.’ The liturgy is the primary way the Church teaches. It is in the Eucharist where we find the most perfect ‘faith formation program,’ and we are evangelized, catechized, and made holy as we are drawn into the mystery of our salvation. It is transformational as we become one with our God at the moment of Holy Communion. As we are fed with God’s Word and Body and Blood, we are strengthened and with joy in our hearts, we are sent forth to live the mystery that we have just celebrated.

[T]he Eucharist is also celebrated at times in our Catholic schools. Although some may not be able to share fully in the celebration, Jesus can still touch the hearts and minds of staff and students as they listen to him and accompany him on the road, and his presence in the liturgy nourishes all who gather. The Eucharist has the power to heal, to unify, and to inspire our diverse school communities.

Catholic education must remain committed to the essential work of forming leaders in our faith tradition for the future. Our apostolic faith is built on the witness of those who have experienced the Risen Christ in their lives and who have shared that truth in the way they live: close to Jesus, receiving the Eucharist, engaged in parish life, serving their families and those most in need. We need such leaders if we are to ensure that our Catholic schools are genuinely to be communities that build and nurture relationships, capable of accompanying and engaging with those within the community, and ultimately giving witness to the joy of the Gospel. Careful attention must be given to support the formation of such leaders.

Catholic school boards are encouraged to support processes for faith formation for emerging leaders, and to approach this important task in ways that are comprehensive, systematic, thoughtful, intentional, and well-resourced.

(cont’d next page)
The Breaking of the Bread (cont’d)

Catholic schools are places where children and young people encounter Jesus, and where they are encouraged to enter more deeply into a personal relationship with Him. They are privileged places, together with the family and the parish community, where our faith is handed on, and this can only succeed with the cooperation of all concerned. In a rapidly changing world, our Catholic schools provide students with firm ground upon which to stand because they are founded on Christ who is the sure foundation. It is in Christ that we will find the wisdom, the courage, the creativity and the integrity to work together in realizing the great promise of Catholic education. May everything we do be for the greater glory of God!

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario Easter, 2018

- What effects does the Eucharist have on the life of your Catholic school?

- What can we do – as members of the Catholic parish-home-school community – to help ensure that the “great promise of Catholic education” endures?