

**The  
Religious Dimension  
Of  
Education  
In  
Edmonton Catholic Schools**

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**A Manifesto \*  
For  
Catholic Education**

\*a public statement of purpose of an organization  
by an authoritative body of persons  
(Oxford/Webster amalgam)

**Revised  
June '05**

## **RAISON d'ETRE**

### **Inspired by**

- **Love of the Creator**
- **Faith in Jesus Christ**
- **Hope from the Holy Spirit**

### **Mandated by**

- **The parents and guardians of our students**
- **The educational mission of the Church**
- **The Alberta Ministry of education**

### **We believe**

- That each person is created in the image and likeness of God
- In the goodness, dignity, and worth of each person
- That all can learn and develop their gifts
- That Catholic education includes spiritual growth and fulfillment
- That Catholic education is a shared responsibility in which parents have a primary role
- That Christ is our model and our teacher
- In building Christ-centered communities for service to one another
- In celebrating and witnessing to our faith in truth and life; holiness and grace; justice, love and peace
- That learning is a life-long journey
- That all have rights, roles and responsibilities for which they are accountable
- In making the world a better place in which to live

### **The mission of Edmonton Catholic Schools**

To provide a Catholic education  
which inspires and prepares students  
to learn, to work, to live fully  
and to serve God in one another.

## **“The Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools”**

Edmonton Catholic Schools engaged in an extensive consultative process in establishing the district’s goals for its three year plan 1996 – 1999.

The district’s mission statement was presented through the 1997 – 1998 school year in a series of commissioning activities and shared throughout the district.

The mission statement of the district emanates from the mandate of the Board of Trustees and from the common beliefs of the Catholic community.

The phrase “Catholic education” (as seen in the mission statement) focuses and guides the activity of the Edmonton Catholic School community.

**“The Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools”** is an expression of the district’s mission to become a Catholic education community. Only by becoming a Catholic education community, does the district live up to its mission statement.

**“The Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools”** relates to all district documents. Specifically, it

- connects to all district goals;
- corresponds to Common Essential Learning Outcome (CELO) #1 directly and relates to all CELOs in an integrative fashion;
- embraces objectives, initiatives, programs outlined in other district and school documents such as School Growth Plans, Annual Reports, Board Governance;
- most recently, pervades the intent of the Board of Trustees’ position of understanding on Catholic Education (January 13-15, 1999).

**“The Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools”** attempts to describe the religious foundation for the living out, the witnessing, the manifestation of our Catholic identity in all our endeavors.

**“The Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools”**

- outlines characteristics of Catholic identity
- links components of Catholic identity to Catholic education
- provides indicators that reflect the meaning and expression of Catholic education
- issues calls to action.

These aims are developed as follows:

**Part One: Who are we? A Catholic identity.** Page(s)

- The faith context 5
- Catholicism: a vision 6
- Catholic theological principles 7
- Catholic identity 8
- Eight characteristics of Catholicism 9-16
  - Community 9
  - Tradition 10
  - Humanness 11
  - Sacramentality 12
  - Rationality 13
  - Spirituality 14
  - Justice 15
  - Hospitality 16
- Summary 17

**Part Two: What is Catholic education? Linking “Catholic” to schooling.**

- What is Catholic Education? 18
- The implications of the eight characteristics for Catholic schools 19-26
  - Community 19
  - Tradition 20
  - Humanness 21
  - Sacramentality 22
  - Rationality 23
  - Spirituality 24
  - Justice 25
  - Hospitality 26

**Part Three: What makes our schools Catholic? Catholic school indicators.**

- Catholic school awareness guidelines 27
- Indicators for each of the eight characteristics 28-32
  - Community 28
  - Tradition 29
  - Humanness 30
  - Sacramentality 31
  - Rationality 32
  - Spirituality 33
  - Justice 34
  - Hospitality 35

**Part Four: What can we do?** Exhortations for action.

- A Meditation 36
- Resources on Catholic Education 37

## PART ONE

### Who are we?

*Catholic schools operate within at least two contexts: faith and culture. The faith context informs culture through a grasp of the identity, the theological principles and vision of Catholicism.*

#### **The faith context**

*“The gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1: 11)*

The Trinity is the foundation of Catholic faith. Professions of Catholic faith follow a trinitarian framework and speak of Father (Creator), Son (Redeemer) and Holy Spirit (Sanctifier).

Catholic faith rests on the conviction that we, the human family, are not alone.

- Whether we know it or not, we live our lives in the hands of a caring and compassionate God who is the source of all life.
- Everything in our human experience, therefore, is important. There is no such thing as profane or secular experience; everything created by God is sacred.
- There are no actions or experiences, joys or sufferings, hopes or anxieties too trivial to be integrated into a life focused on God.

Catholic faith rests on the conviction that we know God reveals to us, pre-eminently through the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the sacred and significant dimension of life.

- Christ reveals God to us so we can see God’s presence in all people.
- God’s revelation through Jesus Christ affirms that we are known by name and that we are loved by a God who holds us in great esteem.
- Catholics commit to the development of peoples recognizing their dignity as persons so that they may be able to participate dynamically in the various aspects of society.

Catholic faith rests on the conviction that we have received from Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, the mandate to announce the mystery of salvation to all and to renew all things in Christ.

- Jesus proclaims the good news that God wills for us the fullness of life.
- The Holy Spirit inspires Catholics to proclaim this good news in dialogue with the world.
- Catholics have always recognized their education mission as an important instrument of dialogue in announcing the good news and contributing to the good of society. One of the ways of entering into this dialogue is through Catholic schools.

## **Catholicism: a vision**

*“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (I Thessalonians 4, 3)*

The Catholic faith context leads to a distinctive Catholic vision which is our response to God’s intervention in human history.

The faith context invites Catholics to see the world in a unique way, as created by God and sustained by God’s love. God’s presence is made manifest in material and sensual ways in a world both fallen and redeemed, both blessed and broken; it is a world which reveals the reality of evil and the healing power of grace.

Through faith, Catholics see God’s dynamic presence throughout all creation as the gift which brings everything to completion in the final reign of God, a reign of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love, and peace.

## **Catholic theological principles**

As the catechism has said, we are made to know, love and serve God. Knowing is an activity that involves the whole person in relationship to what is known. It speaks to both the intellectual and mystical capacities of the human person. A Catholic faith is an adult faith. God's relationship with the human family demands of humans a growth in intimacy and a deeper knowledge of God and God's will.

Theology is an attempt to understand God and God's will; to grasp more and more fully the heart of God's word as revealed through Jesus Christ; to understand our faith relationship with God as it relates to our lives as lived within specific cultural circumstances.

Theology attempts to articulate the faith as existing within a pluralistic culture.

Theology seeks a unity between faith and reason.

Theology elaborates the Catholic vision and identity.

Theology brings the Catholic community into dialogue with philosophical and scientific discourse.

Theology connects the ongoing experience and practice of faith in the world

Theology relates with other communities with whom we interact

The faith context, the vision, and theological principles invite Catholics:

- to acknowledge the importance of human reason as a means of understanding reality
- to be open to truth and grace wherever they may be found
- to recognize that the divine is at work in all creation
- to attend to the sacred order of creation
- to celebrate life in all its bodiliness and sensuality
- to understand that humanity is created in God's image, created with dignity and freedom, yet capable of choosing contrary to God's design
- to affirm different races, nations, cultures
- to enter into community
- to recognize sinfulness and the need for forgiveness

## **Catholic identity**

What can be said that characterizes a Catholic identity? A number of characteristics or dimensions of Catholic identity have been identified by various writers as:

- Community
- Tradition
- Humanness
- Sacramentality
- Rationality
- Spirituality
- Justice
- Hospitality

These characteristics are neither exhaustive of nor exclusive to Catholicism. It is the particular way in which they are woven throughout the Catholic experience that informs the Catholic identity. It is through a consideration of each of these eight characteristics that the Edmonton Catholic School division is invited to address the question, “Who are we?”

## Community

*“In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” (1 Corinthians 12: 13)*

- Catholics cannot be content with an individual relationship with God
- Catholics approach God together
- Catholics commit to living as a community, as a people of God in the world
- Catholics together create church which lives in creative tension with society and exists as a sacrament of the reign of God in the world
- Catholics dialogue with society for the sake of the common good
- The common good is the ultimate measure of justice and includes the well being of each individual person and the structuring of society to serve the welfare of the entire human family
- The Catholic community serves the common good of society by integrating faith and culture and thereby transforming society

Catholics find authentic expression of their beliefs amidst the realities of culture. The experience of Catholicism brings together so much of the human family, living in so many cultures, into one people. Catholicism encompasses a people, an actual social community among other communities of history. It is a social community, divergent and extensive, knit together with visible and invisible bonds.

More significantly, catholicity is more than scope, more than an extension to many cultures. This Catholic community, which extends over time and space, finds its life source in the traditional belief that the church represents the mystical Body of Christ. It is a human-divine reality blessed and invigorated by the Holy Spirit and by Jesus Christ as its head. It is, therefore, a community with a divinely-given reality, identity, authority, power, and grace whose life is to bring about a synthesis of culture and faith, of faith and life. As a community, Catholics are called to transform culture so that it is imbued with the Gospel.

Catholicism agrees that everyone is to have their own personal relationship with God. Nevertheless, Catholics express that personal relationship with God within the context of the faith community. As a community, Catholics, united by their beliefs and practices and sharing common rituals, express themselves as a church in both universal and local forms. In its universal dimension, Catholics share communion with Rome. The local church finds expression within the partnership of home, parish, and support groups such as Catholic schools.

The Catholic church, local and universal, never exists for its own sake. It is a sign of the Reign of God in the world. The reign of God, which begins now (“on earth as it is in heaven”) as human wholeness in God, is a profoundly social symbol which demands social engagement. The church’s mission involves dialogue with the world with the reminder that society is to function for the common good. When social structures fail the common good, the church’s response is commitment to social transformation.

## Tradition

*“We must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” (Hebrews 2, 1)*

- Tradition is foundational to the formation of the Catholic community
- Tradition is the premeditated act of a fragile people not wanting to lose what they love
- Catholics seek insight into what dimensions of experience reflect the values of the reign of God
- Catholics reflect on the profound impact of radical change in order to direct this change into humane channels
- The focus of tradition is clarified by a vision of the future in Christ

The reality and “weight” of tradition and history are foundational to the formation of the Catholic community. It is community that is at the heart of tradition. For what is handed on in the tradition is the life-giving nature of an authentic community that is in right relationship with its God.

Tradition means holding on to the life of the community, being open to the continuing action of the Holy Spirit and paying homage to the God who acts in the history of a people. Catholics read scripture and the life and experience of the church and all people to gain deeper insights into God’s presence within human history. This is the foundation of Christian hope.

Catholics reflect on the profound impact and experience of radical changes in the social, political, economic and ecclesial realities of modern life in order to guide these changes into humane channels which reflect authentic community. Catholics creatively reevaluate, reinterpret and reformulate human experience, adapting to change, while maintaining the best and most fundamental values, values that characterize the gospel imperative to

cooperate with God in manifesting the reign of God.

Tradition does not mean holding on to marginal and irrelevant elements of a community. Tradition is not traditionalism. Rather, its focus is clarified by a vision of the future in Christ. This vision of the future invites discernment. Critical reflection is necessary in order to gain insight into what dimensions of past and present experience truly reflect the essence of a community committed to the values of the reign of God.

Respect for the tradition also allows for radically differing views. And in response to the reality of different understandings of the Catholic vision, Catholics are guided by the inspiration of Vatican II: unity in all things necessary, compassion in all things different, charity in all things.

In attempting to appreciate the community essence of the four thousand year Hebrew/Christian experience of God, Catholics view tradition as the premeditated act of a fragile people not wanting to lose what they love.

## Humanness

*“And being found in human form, he humbled himself.”* (Philippians 2, 8)

- God affirms the essential goodness of the human condition in becoming human in Jesus
- Catholics embrace humanness as a gift, celebrate it as essentially good, relish its joys, are tolerant of its imperfections, and merciful when it sins
- Catholics embrace, celebrate, enjoy their humanness through a love of life and an appreciation of the bodiliness of the human condition
- Catholics see human existence as both personal and social
- Catholics believe in the possibility of growth and conversion

There is a remarkable sense of humanity and grace in the communal life of Catholics. The love of life, the appreciation of the body, the celebration of joy and grief, the acceptance of the sinner are clearly and universally embodied in Catholics and Catholic life.

Traditionally, Catholics have regarded the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Earth-bound symbols mark the celebrations of earthly living: the uses of bread, wine, candles, incense, touches (laying on of hands), oil, water testify to the connection human life has with the created universe. These attitudes and actions speak to the reverence Catholics have for the human body and for the human condition.

A Catholic attitude towards the human condition is decidedly positive and benevolent. Catholics embrace their humanness as a gift, celebrate the essential goodness of being human, take delight in the enjoyment of human living, tolerate human imperfections, and are merciful in the face of human sinfulness.

As well, and because of this appreciation for the human, Catholics develop a commitment and concern for the world

and for men and women to bring forth ethical and moral convictions to social and historical events. With Catholicism lies the possibility of a creative application of the Gospel’s sense of tolerance, charity, and concern for the world’s life to modern social injustices and miseries.

The creation story of our tradition reminds us that we are made in God’s image and have been given special responsibility to all of creation. We are called to cooperate with God, to be God’s partners, in the building up of God’s reign. Each of us is endowed with unique gifts in order to form the larger body we call Christ. It is in our humanness that we are partners with God as co-creators in establishing God’s reign which is characterized by “truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace.”

The ultimate affirmation of the human condition is God becoming human in Jesus. All that Jesus assumed, he redeemed. By becoming human, God ennobled the human body and uplifted the human spirit. The ancient maxim “God became what we are so we might become what God is” is the inspiration for the joy we have in our humanness.

## Sacramentality

*“God saw everything that was made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Genesis 1, 31)*

- Catholicism points to the world as gracious, meaningful, and worthwhile
- Catholicism rejects the notion of putting the sacred to profane use; everything is sacred and is to be respected
- Catholics celebrate the sacraments to mark the grace-filled encounter between God and the human family that is always taking place
- Catholics look to the ordinary things and events of human life and see God
- Catholics see in all of creation the opportunity to make the most out of life and to become fully alive human beings
- Catholics choose life because it is good
- Catholics regard the environment with care and respect because it is good

All of creation is the ordinary medium of God’s outreach to the human family. God communicates to humans through nature and the created order; through human culture and society; through our minds and bodies; through everything and anything of our world. All of these expressions of the created order reveal God who, as creator, dwells in all of creation. Therefore, everything created is good because it is of God. A Catholic attitude to the world affirms the world as so good as to be sacramental. That is, it is made holy and is sacred.

Sacramentality means that we both encounter God and respond to God through the medium of life in the world. The Catholic character of sacramentality means that Catholics experience life surrounded by, enveloped by, imbued with the sacred. Our response is reverence and respect.

Further to the sacramentality of all things, indeed as an integral dimension to the goodness of creation, it has been the Catholic experience that God’s presence and grace are mediated through symbols that speak to the entire course

of human life. The great sacrament of encounter with God is Jesus Christ. The church, in turn, is the fundamental sacrament of encounter with Christ. The Catholic experience of the presence of God and of grace has been embodied within ancient yet contemporary liturgical structures through symbols that are taken from ordinary human living: bread, wine, water, oil, human love, words, gestures.

Thus, every liturgical sacrament celebrates and epitomizes an aspect of the sacramentality of life and creation. The sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist – invite us into a lifelong journey of growth within community and in appreciation for God’s continuing presence in our lives. The sacraments of vocation – Matrimony and Orders – mark our commitment to a life of service to the values of the reign of God in the variety of involvements we experience in our relationships. The sacraments of healing – Anointing and Reconciliation - bring us back to authentic relationship when we have failed.

## **Rationality**

*“Know how you ought to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4, 6)*

- Beauty, goodness and truth have found expression in Catholic life throughout its history
- Catholics seek truth rationally and critically as well as through appreciation and respect
- Catholics see reason as an essential ally in coming to know the truth in God’s creation
- Catholics are people of faith seeking understanding

We are called to know, love and serve God. In addition to appreciating and embracing the beauty and goodness of creation, Catholics have always sought to know the truth revealed in creation. All these qualities of being – beauty, goodness, truth – have found expression in Catholic life throughout its history. These expressions reflect the Catholic insistence that the divine mystery manifest in tradition and in all of creation be understood, appreciated, and explicated by the most acute rational reflection.

Learning, knowing the truth, is an important component of Catholic life. Throughout Catholic history reason has played an important role in the search for truth. The critical and speculative powers of reason are seen as allowing for an active and open stance in relation to the truth.

Nevertheless, the creation story associates knowing with the serpent. Knowing and the powers of reason that participate in the search to know must be ordered toward holistic knowing and to a Catholic way of wisdom. Wisdom encourages integrity between the one who knows and what is known. Reason therefore is important insofar as it

contributes to wisdom. Becoming wise engages reason and goes beyond reason to ensure that knowledge is life-giving – for self, for others, for the world. Coming to know the truth through reason allows learners to give life by ordering what is learned towards the building up of the Reign of God.

Openness to the truth characterizes the attitude needed to know the truth. In its deepest sense, openness acknowledges that Truth is revealed in God’s revelation – Truth seeks us first. God takes the initiative. Intuitive knowledge – whereby truth finds its way into our consciousness – is recognized as legitimate knowing and acknowledges that truth reveals itself notwithstanding our own efforts.

Nevertheless, knowing the truth also requires active pursuit as people try to make sense of and give meaning to their lives. Catholics recognize that the attempt to make sense of and give meaning to life is an endeavor that encompasses every kind of knowing. Personal knowledge may be attained through any of a number of strategies and intelligences, all of which open the way to a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the mystery of creation.

## Spirituality

*“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19, 2)*

- Catholics recognize that all people are called to be holy
- Spirituality is the way we live our beliefs
- Catholic spirituality integrates personal and communal lives
- Catholic spirituality is oriented to social justice
- Personal and communal prayer foster the spiritual life

For Catholics, the call to holiness is a universal invitation to be in communion with God. This is no distant ideal proposed only to saints and mystics, but to every baptized person. All are called to a life based on the gospel mandate to love, a love manifested in the interpersonal life of believers and in the global community alike. And the search is a prolonged one, involving a life-long journey of discovery and learning that engages all the principles of Catholic identity.

Catholic spirituality is rooted in the life of the Trinity, acknowledging God as the source of all creation, centered on Jesus Christ, situated within the church, ever responsive to the Holy Spirit, and oriented to the coming of the Reign of God in all its fullness.

God’s call to holiness demands that every dimension and aspect of life be integrated. St. Paul enjoins us to live “according to the Spirit” (Romans 8, 5) so that the Spirit of God dwells in us as the principle of our very lives.

Spirituality has to do with the way Catholics live their beliefs. Personally,

integration of life entails an attitude of wholeness with respect to individual identity. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality implies taking care of the self physically, with due attention to good health. Socially, there is the need to live in community both locally and globally. The good health of the entire human family is a personal and social responsibility.

Prayer, both personal and communal, although not synonymous with spirituality, is nevertheless needed to sustain and foster spirituality.

Communally, Catholics participate in the liturgy of the church, primarily in the celebration of the Eucharist/Divine Liturgy. This sacramental event symbolically gathers up the human/divine encounters of daily life and creates a heightened experience of the God-human relationship.

In personal prayer (“turning the mind and heart to God”), Catholics give praise and thanks to God, express repentance for wrongdoing, and ask for God’s help. Meditation and contemplation are also time-honoured approaches to prayer.

## Justice

*“He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”* (Luke 4, 18)

- Catholics relate to human need with both charity and justice
- Catholics embrace their obligation to work in solidarity with all people to build a more human world
- The gospel inspires a preferential option for the poor and marginalized
- The dignity of the human person, the primacy of the common good, and the primacy of workers are the cornerstones of Catholic social justice
- Social and political structures need to be arranged to afford full participation by all

The social teaching of the church has its roots in scripture, in the teachings of the Fathers of the church, and in political and social philosophy. This social teaching is a body of ethical principles that derive from the nature, dignity, and destiny of the human person and the human family.

Catholic social teaching establishes justice as a core commitment of faith and a sign of the Reign of God. Church statements capture the scriptural bases for justice, insisting that Catholics have a preferential option for the poor and marginalized. The synod of Catholic bishops has declared that “Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbour.”

Further, “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel, or, in other words, of the church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

The twin pillars of social justice in the Catholic tradition are the dignity of the human person and the common good. These principles challenge Catholics to bring good news to the poor and marginalized in their personal lives and in social and political life.

For Catholics, there can be no separation of politics and religion. Social justice condemns every kind of discrimination on any basis (gender, race, class, orientation, religion, condition) and every structural arrangement (legal, economic, political) that exploits or excludes anyone from full participation in society. Social justice requires that the structures of society welcome and provide full participation by all.

Indeed, Catholic social teaching reflects the gospel injunction to give special attention to the poor and the marginalized (“preferential option for the poor” is a phrase that captures the spirit of the Catechism in speaking of service to people who have been shunted off to the margins of society). Catholics, by their life within society, are enjoined to work towards achieving the possibility of full participation by all, especially those who have been marginalized.

## Hospitality

*“Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9: 37)*

- Being Catholic entails an abiding love for all people with commitment to their welfare, rights, justice
- Catholics welcome human diversity, learn from other traditions, and live in solidarity with all, particularly the marginalized
- Catholics cherish their own particular cultural identities while reaching for a global consciousness
- The Catholic community is inclusive of diverse peoples and perspectives; is free of discrimination and sectarianism; and welcomes strangers especially those most in need

The richest meaning of “catholic” is the one closest to its etymology: welcoming everyone. Inclusion and outreach (catholicity) certainly characterize the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus sought out and preached to every segment of society and brought together what has been described as an inclusive community of disciples. Not only did he meet with scribes and pharisees, but a damning criticism of him was that he “ate with tax collectors and sinners.”

The Risen Christ commissioned the community of disciples to make disciples of all nations. On the first Pentecost, the good news was preached to people of various ethnic backgrounds and each heard the gospel in their own languages.

Hospitality, however, is not an uncritical acceptance and welcoming. It requires an understanding of relationships. Hospitality implies a host, a host with special responsibilities, of guarding the tradition which is the structure of living into which people are welcomed, of guarding the tradition in ways that guarantee that the thing works.

Hospitality is a generous word but it is not simply saying “okay, come in” and “our home is yours.” Yes our home is home to those who are welcomed, but it is still our home and hospitality calls for dialogue to decide how we can live our roles in this home. It is through this dialogue whereby the defining structures of the home – family, community, nation, religious tradition – may be restructured so that new ways of living may be discovered.

Catholic hospitality welcomes dialogue with other expressions of human living and creativity. It enables us to know whose people we are while being open and adaptable to the signs of the times and to whatever the future brings.

## **Summary**

Finally, it can be said that in the end what characterizes Catholicism is its refusal to take either/or positions on life's questions. In our search for truth – or rather in Truth's search for us – Catholics hold divergent views in a healthy, vigorous, challenging tension. Jesus of Nazareth responds to questions and challenges with stories, stories that invite a myriad of insights, possibilities, resolutions. Richard McBrien, S.J, a leading Catholic theologian, summarizes the Catholic character:

Catholicism is a comprehensive, all embracing, catholic tradition, characterized by a both/and rather than an either/or approach. It is not nature or grace, but graced nature; not reason or faith, but reason illumined by faith; not law or Gospel, but law inspired by the Gospel; not Scripture or tradition, but normative tradition within Scripture; not faith or works, but faith issuing in works and works as expressions of faith; not authority or freedom, but authority in the service of freedom.

## PART TWO

### What is Catholic Education?

“The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church.”

- *The Catholic School*, para. 9

“The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole person, since in Christ, the perfect human being, all human values find their fulfilment and unity. Herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school. Its duty to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right in accordance with its particular mission to serve all people has its origin in the figure of Christ.”

- *The Catholic School*, para. 35

Edmonton Catholic Schools seek to create a learning environment that reflects the identity and character of the Catholic church. Local schools and the entire division strive to become learning environments that express the uniqueness of the Catholic experience.

Because the task of the Catholic school is “fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life,” it is subsequently the task of Catholic schools to apply the Catholic character of the local community to local school situations. Each local expression of the Catholic school community is called to identify its own expression of what it means to be a Catholic school.

The eight “characters” that describe the Catholic experience of church invite the school division and each school within the division to discover the Catholic implications for education in the local school. The division and each local school community reflect on the eight characters of Catholic identity and articulate the ways in which those characters can find expression.

Further, the division and the schools can then describe specific indicators that can assist members of the schools and the division can direct policies and practices that guarantee and reflect an authentic Catholic education experience.

In preparing to articulate the Religious Dimension of Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools, a number of groups have been asked to name implications of Catholic identity on the Catholic school experience and to identify indicators of Catholic education according to the eight characters of Catholic identity that have been described.

The implications of Catholic identity on Catholic education that follow represent the beginnings of an understanding on what it means to be a Catholic school and a Catholic school jurisdiction. Insofar as the experience of Catholic education is a journey towards fulfillment in the Reign of God, the discovery process is lifelong. Understandings of Catholic identity and Catholic schooling continue to be refined and deepened. Edmonton Catholic Schools will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, continue to develop clearer understandings of ways to give expression to its mission.

## **Community**

What does the community dimension mean for a Catholic school community?

The fundamental task of Catholic schools is the integration of faith and culture and the integration of faith and life. The task is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge and in the growth of the virtues characteristic of Christians. Through this integration, the Catholic school models the kind of community that forms students to be citizens who care for the common good and people of faith committed to the reign of God in the world. Catholic schools contribute to the common good of society.

### **Building the Community Dimension of Catholic Schools**

- Catholic schools – school staffs, parents, parish – commit themselves to the common good.
- Catholic schools address the personal well being of students and every member of the education community
- Catholic schools invite students to develop a critical social consciousness so that they may engage in their responsibility towards social transformation
- Catholic schools alert students to detect injustice, discrimination and oppression and will inspire them to oppose such social evils for the sake of the common good
- Catholic schools nurture in learners the conviction that God’s love is universal and that all humans are members of God’s family
- Catholic schools invite learners to be active and contributing members of the larger community
- Catholic schools engage the larger community to support the education of students

### **Strategies to develop the Community Dimension of Catholic Schools:**

- invite reflection on the mission statement of the school and school jurisdiction
- encourage committees that will animate the life of the school
- celebrate the unity within the diversity of the school population
- celebrate and participate in societal and community events and church sponsored initiatives such as Family Day, United Nations Day, Ecumenism
- foster social consciousness by addressing social ills through events such as Share Lent, Elimination of Racism Day
- integrate community service programs and projects into the life of the school
- hold induction ceremonies for new staff, students, parents, welcoming them into the community
- communicate to school community members about the life of the school

## **Tradition**

How can tradition be life-giving in Catholic education?

The fundamental source of human knowing is encounter with the world and its history through experience. The guiding intent for the curriculum is to educate people to become fully alive and free human beings. In a Catholic context, this source and this guiding intent both point to the experience of the community, an experience where Jesus Christ is encountered and the values of the Reign of God direct human action and being. Simply put, we learn through life.

Catholic education brings a focus to learning to discover, evaluate, interpret the human experience, which is always in transition, in ways that enhance and deepen appreciation for the gift of creation and provide insight into how learning can lead to fullness and freedom for all people.

### **Handing on the Tradition in Catholic schools**

- Catholic education respects all that is life-giving and worthwhile in human creativity and culture in all its manifestations
- Catholic education believes that the subject matter of all knowledge is interconnected
- Catholic schools seek wisdom to gather all knowledge towards the capacity to liberate people to more humane living
- Catholic schools acknowledge that the humanities, liberal arts, sciences and all disciplines of learning – including manual and professional trades – can and should be taught in ways that contribute to a humanizing education
- Catholic schools respect all cultural and religious traditions that are life-giving
- Catholic schools are inspired by the hope that comes with living the gospel

### **Strategies to develop a respect for the life-giving dimensions of tradition:**

- provide access to the tradition of human culture – works of art, literature, etc. – as a way of engaging learners in conversation with the past
- invite learners to bring the symbols and artifacts of tradition into their own lives with a questioning and interpreting attitude
- invite learners to come to know for themselves the wisdom, knowledge, or beauty of the tradition
- allow for the occasion for moral discourse and provide access to models of responding to the moral questions raised in the study of the past
- invite learners into a critical assessment of experience so they may discern what is life-giving and life-enhancing
- celebrate the hope that comes with recognizing God's continuing action in the life of the community

## **Humanness**

How does Catholic education respect the dignity of human persons?

In partnership with the family and with the entire community, the Catholic school has a value and importance that are fundamental to the integral human formation of children. In virtue of its mission, the Catholic school constantly and carefully attends to the cultivation in children of the intellectual, creative and aesthetic gifts of the human person.

Catholic schools foster in children an appreciation of their God-given dignity; the ability to make correct use of their judgement, will and affectivity; promote in them a sense of values; encourage just attitudes and prudent behaviour; introduce to them the cultural heritage handed down from past generations; prepare them for professional life; and encourage the friendly interchange of diverse cultures and backgrounds that will lead to mutual understanding.

In short, Catholic schools contribute to integral human formation. Catholic schools strive to form strong and responsible persons who are capable of making free and correct choices and are able to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life.

### **Cultivating the Human Dimension in Catholic School**

- A Catholic appreciation of our humanness means that learning strategies should engage the whole person across the educational spectrum.
- A Catholic education addresses learners' reason, their emotions, the physical reality of bodiliness.
- Catholic education builds a curriculum based on the lived experience of learners
- Catholic education promotes a variety of learning methods
- Catholic education challenges the mind, the heart, the body

### **Strategies to develop the Human Dimension of Catholic Schools:**

- give appropriate emphasis to academic excellence
- support art, music, drama, dance and other fine arts and performing arts
- create a healthy respect for physical education and manual arts
- recognize the importance of fun and humour
- exercise forgiveness and reconciliation
- create discipline policies that are firm, fair and flexible and that respect the dignity of persons and invite forgiveness and reconciliation

## **Sacramentality**

How does Catholic education express the sacramentality of all creation?

A sacramental outlook invites Catholic educators to develop and nurture their own sacramental consciousness. When Catholic educators live their own lives in appreciation of the goodness of creation and as meaningful and worthwhile, their attitude permeates their interactions in the educational milieu and will encourage a similar outlook in others.

The ideal of a Catholic school is to educate its members into a world that is sacred and holy because it is God's creation. Appreciation for God's gift finds expression in the attitudes and actions of a school community through liturgy and stewardship. School policies and practices include reverence for the sacredness of created things through environmentally respectful actions that regard creation as the Lord's and for the enhancement of the life of all people.

### **Creating a Sacramental Consciousness in Catholic Education**

- Catholic education encourages an aesthetic sense and sense of celebration
- Catholic education encourages an ecological consciousness
- The Catholic school community participates in the sacramental life of the church
- Professional development programs address issues of care for creation
- A care for creation ethic permeates the study of the sciences, humanities and the fine and industrial arts

### **Strategies to develop a Sacramental Awareness in Catholic Schools**

- create attractive learning environments
- attend to the sacred dimension in all subject areas
- celebrate key moments in the life of the community
- provide opportunities to participate in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church
- include sacramental awareness programs in faith and professional development activities
- keep a clean and healthy environment for learning
- promote environmental awareness programs
- celebrate the gifts of creation, e.g. Earth Day
- participate in recycling programs
- encourage responsible stewardship of resources

## **Rationality**

How can Catholic educators educate for wisdom?

The real subjects in Catholic education are the learners in the sense that wisdom requires that learners be the primary agents of their own learning. Learners are invited to see for themselves: to be active agents of their learning rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Learners are encouraged to use their whole minds in the pursuit of learning – their reason, memory and imagination. And because learning proceeds from what is known to the unknown, learners' own life experiences become the building blocks to new learning.

An attitude of openness to the truth requires that practices of exclusion – such as racism and sexism – be absent from the learning environment. Wisdom is the antithesis of injustice. Such openness also welcomes everyone into the learning process. Everyone's voice can be heard in the learning environment just as everyone has the opportunity to learn.

### **Enhancing the qualities of Reason and Rationality in Catholic Schools**

- Catholic education invites learners to be the primary agents of their learning
- Catholic education relates knowledge to wisdom
- Catholic education connects learning to the building up of the Reign of God
- Catholic education is inclusive and open to the truth wherever it is revealed
- Catholic education reflects the academic dimension of religious education programs

#### **Strategies to engage Reason and Rationality in Catholic Schools:**

- encourage social analysis: the context of learning gives meaning to the content; cultural contexts and worldviews are open to question; other perspectives can be viewed
- promote responsibility and commitment: take learners beyond their own knowledge; discover how knowledge can be life-giving
- sensitize learning: investigate whose interests are served by what we learn; relate learning to the Reign of God
- encourage relational learning: allow for different styles of learning; collaborative learning; cooperative learning
- foster the professional development of teachers in the study of theology and religious education
- assess student learning in the religious dimension based on the cognitive understanding of faith integration into all subject areas
- celebrate academic achievement

## **Spirituality**

How do Catholic schools integrate spirituality into the learning environment?

Catholicism is not simply a system of beliefs; it is also a life to be lived: a life of worship, shaped by the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and a life of moral commitment and behaviour, shaped by moral values rooted in the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Catholic schools foster this way of life grounded in the love of God and the values of the Reign of God proclaimed in the gospels.

Spirituality in Catholic schools consists in letting God be present in each moment of the day, becoming attuned to God's presence in the ups and downs of the life journey of the school community. Prayer and a commitment to the moral and ethical values of the gospel provide the opening to God's presence. The Catholic school, therefore, is a place of prayer, a place where the principles of Christian morality find expression in the interactions that take place there.

Catholic schools invite all members of the learning community into that place of prayer and moral living by modeling a prayer life in the school and by providing a learning environment characterized by relationships that are caring and nurturing.

### **Nurturing Spirituality in Catholic Schools**

- Catholic schools acknowledge God's presence through prayer and virtuous living
- Catholic schools provide time to reflect on and meditate on the life messages of the gospel
- Professional and faith development opportunities include the spiritual dimension of the life of educators
- Resources on spirituality are provided to all members of the school community
- Catholic schools participate in the liturgical life of the church
- The moral development of learners becomes a focus for learning
- The faith formation of teachers is a priority in Catholic education
- New expressions of spirituality (e.g. creation, liberation, feminist) are promoted in Catholic schools

### **Strategies for nurturing Spirituality in Catholic Schools**

- make resources for spirituality available to all members of the community
- provide opportunities for retreat and reflection days
- participate in faith development activities
- structure prayer into the life of the school on a daily basis
- celebrate Catholic identity through prayer, liturgy and worship
- celebrate school events, the various passages and seasons of the year with religious rituals
- celebrate school patron saints, school feasts

## **Justice**

How do Catholic schools do justice?

Not an option, justice is a mandate of Catholic faith. From the beginning, the educational mission of the church has been seen as participation in God's saving mission. The divine edict of justice requires education for personal and social transformation.

The Catholic school, since it is motivated by the gospel message of Jesus Christ to proclaim liberty to the oppressed, is particularly sensitive to the call from every part of the world for a more just society, and it tries to make its own contribution towards it. It does not stop at the courageous teaching of the demands of justice even in the face of local opposition, but it tries to put these demands into practice, first in its own community in the daily life of the school, and then in the wider community.

Catholic schools aim towards a synthesis of faith and culture, of faith and life, syntheses that characterize mature faith. A mature faith will be able to recognize and reject cultural counter-values which threaten human dignity and are therefore contrary to the gospel. Although all the problems of religion and faith will not be completely solved by academic studies, nevertheless, the Catholic school should be a privileged place for finding adequate ways to deal with these problems.

### **Doing Justice in Catholic Schools**

- Catholic schools aim towards the transformation of human culture
- Justice issues are addressed in the curriculum from a faith perspective
- Catholic schools provide just ways of handling conflict
- Catholic school policies encourage just use of resources
- Justice informs Catholic school curricula, policies, enrollment procedures, working conditions
- Catholic schools are accountable to parents, students, the public, the church
- Catholic schools find strength for the journey towards justice for all through critical reflection, prayer and community liturgy

### **Strategies to incorporate the Justice Dimension of Catholic Schools**

- address Catholic social teachings in professional development activities
- refer to Catholic social teachings when addressing issues relating to the curriculum in all subject areas
- enter into relationships with groups that alleviate human suffering, e.g. Amnesty International, St. Vincent de Paul societies, Development and Peace
- become involved in community concerns and projects, particularly those where justice issues arise
- develop conflict resolution policies and practices
- engage in prayerful discernment in matters calling for justice, integrity and faithfulness to the will of God

## **Hospitality**

How can Catholic schools practice hospitality?

Not everyone in Catholic schools is a member of the Catholic church. Nevertheless, the religious freedom and the personal conscience of all students and their families should be respected. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the gospel and to offer an education experience based on the values of the Catholic community. To proclaim or to offer, though, is not to impose.

The gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the school climate. The hospitality dimension of the school is expressed, first of all, through the friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships among all those who enter the school.

Clear understandings of what is expected in behaviour and attitude will develop when they are modeled, especially by staff members under the leadership of school administrators.

### **Practicing Hospitality in Catholic Schools**

- Catholic schools are clear in their understanding of what constitutes Catholic education
- Catholic education welcomes diversity of views and perspectives
- Catholic schools provide a variety of learning methods and appeal to various learning styles
- Catholic schools practice inclusion, welcome and outreach to people in need
- Members of the Catholic school community share a common vision and participate in the shared mission of the Catholic school

### **Strategies to make Catholic Schools places of Hospitality**

- celebrate the unity within the diversity of the school community
- articulate the mission of the school and make it known to all
- become informed about the eastern and western traditions within the Catholic experience
- encourage dialogue among the variety of cultural and religious traditions that comprise the school community
- provide guests with signs of welcome
- establish clear expectations of behaviour within the school and foster like behaviour beyond the school; everyone in the school community represents the whole community
- provide opportunities for staff to deepen their understanding of Catholic identity

## **PART THREE**

### **What makes our schools Catholic?**

#### **Catholic school awareness guidelines**

Teilhard de Chardin once wrote that the world belongs to those who offer it the greatest hope. Catholic schools - by the quality of care they give, the learning opportunities they provide, the enthusiasms and values they share, the compassion and forgiveness they offer - bestow on students the belief that reality is benign and that there is every reason to hope that an all-loving God will be true to the promise to be with them as their God.

The Catholic identity of our schools rests on the degree to which our schools reflect the description of a Catholic school summarized in The Catholic School: “Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in the Catholic school. Without constant reference to the gospel and a frequent encounter with Christ, the Catholic school loses its purpose.” The whole existence of a Catholic school, its operation, function, agenda, curriculum, activities both academic and otherwise, should resonate with the message, values and the very presence of Jesus Christ.

Excellence, accountability, equity and partnership are some of the characteristic features of any school, as identified by the Ministry of Education. Catholic schools actualize all of these qualities. It is the unique aspect of “Catholic” that the partners in Catholic education are invited to articulate, evaluate, heighten and celebrate. The following indicators of Catholic education are guidelines in pursuing a Catholic identity for our schools.

## **Community**

### Indicators

- ✓ Care and concern are evident in everyday interactions
- ✓ Mutual respect is evident between staff and students
- ✓ Opportunities exist for students, staff, parents and others to voice concerns in a safe, fair and respectful way
- ✓ Students feel secure and comfortable so that they may confide in and seek support from staff members
- ✓ Community and societal events such as Family Day, United Nations Day are celebrated
- ✓ Social consciousness is fostered within the curriculum and through the celebration of programs such as Share Lent, Elimination of Racism Day
- ✓ Community service programs are encouraged and organized
- ✓ Partnerships with community agencies and organizations are in harmony with Catholic values and educational principles
- ✓ Induction ceremonies are held to welcome new members to the community
- ✓ Newsletters and other communications instruments inform people about the life of the school
- ✓ Division personnel communicate adequately with all staff
- ✓ Parents are involved in school activities, e.g. lunch programs, “snack moms”, field trips, classroom volunteers
- ✓ Theme days are held to provide variety and fun
- ✓ Shared lesson planning is encouraged
- ✓ “Home Reading Programs” are fostered
- ✓ Cultural activities celebrate variety of cultural backgrounds
- ✓ School Councils are active; meetings are well attended
- ✓ School Councils are representative of the community
- ✓ Guests are welcome in staff rooms
- ✓ “Read-in Week” is celebrated
- ✓ Members of the extended community are invited and welcomed to the school
- ✓ Catholic Education Centre staff are present in the school
- ✓ School community celebrates in the local parish church

## **Tradition**

### Indicators

- ✓ All are familiar with the division's mission statement
- ✓ Catholic school identity is reviewed and reflected on
- ✓ Religious Education programs follow the approved curriculum
- ✓ Religious Education program receives appropriate attention
- ✓ Religious Education consultant services are available
- ✓ School participates in the celebration of the church's liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time
- ✓ Access is provided to the tradition of human culture, e.g. works of art, literature, sculpture
- ✓ The faith dimension is integrated into all subject areas
- ✓ Questioning and critical thinking are encouraged
- ✓ A variety of religious and cultural traditions are respected
- ✓ Catholic Education Sunday and Catholic Education Week are celebrated

## **Humanness**

### Indicators

- ✓ Multiple intelligences are recognized in curriculum and learning activities
- ✓ Staff promotes and encourages a variety of learning methods
- ✓ Art, music, dance, drama and other fine arts and performing arts are integrated into the life of the school
- ✓ Physical education and manual arts are encouraged
- ✓ Discipline policies and practices are fair, firm and flexible and respect the dignity of persons
- ✓ People of all faith traditions are welcome in the school
- ✓ Timetabling respects the need to balance work, prayer, rest and play
- ✓ The school is safe for children
- ✓ Forgiveness and reconciliation characterize discipline practices and policies
- ✓ Conduct policies speak of respect and honesty
- ✓ Assemblies celebrate the gifts of students
- ✓ “Celebrating Our Shepherds” programs are supported
- ✓ Division staff transfer policies respect dignity of persons
- ✓ A Catholic stance on controversial social issues is proclaimed and supported, e.g. abortion, capital punishment, welfare,
- ✓ Adequate resources are available for teachers
- ✓ The poor and marginalized are treated with respect

## **Sacramentality**

### Indicators

- ✓ Attractive learning environments are created
- ✓ The learning environment is clean and healthy
- ✓ Environmental awareness programs are promoted
- ✓ Recycling of material resources is encouraged
- ✓ The school participates in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church
- ✓ Care for creation attitudes and practices are integrated into the study of all subject areas
- ✓ Faith Development Days are celebrated
- ✓ Staff members take leadership in planning and presiding at prayer celebrations
- ✓ Prayer is part of the daily life of the school
- ✓ Students actively and reverently participate in liturgical and prayer celebrations
- ✓ People are treated with reverence and respect
- ✓ School cooperates with parish in preparing for the sacraments
- ✓ Religious symbols and other visible decorations, notices, etc. proclaim the Catholic identity of schools and division buildings

## **Rationality**

### Indicators

- ✓ The approved curriculum is followed
- ✓ An atmosphere conducive to learning is maintained
- ✓ Learning takes place through a variety of approaches
- ✓ Teachers are well prepared for their classroom activities
- ✓ Adequate learning resources are available in all subject areas
- ✓ Accomplishments of students and staff are recognized
- ✓ Professional development opportunities are available to all staff
- ✓ Consultant services are available to teachers
- ✓ Theology courses and inservices are available to all staff
- ✓ Learning is related to gospel values
- ✓ Student progress reports acknowledge multiple intelligences and the variety of learning styles
- ✓ Adequate consultant services are available to assist teachers and teacher aides
- ✓ All subject areas are valued
- ✓ Religion program resources are adequate and up-to-date
- ✓ Questioning and critical thinking are encouraged and taught
- ✓ Students are led to recognize the connections between the various strands of their education

## **Spirituality**

### Indicators

- ✓ Prayer is part of the school day
- ✓ Occasions are provided for personal prayer
- ✓ Professional development programs address the spiritual life of staff members
- ✓ Patron saints and church feasts are celebrated
- ✓ Accomplishments of students and staff are recognized and celebrated
- ✓ Teachable moments to integrate Christian values and insights into all disciplines are identified and pursued
- ✓ Hiring policies give preference to active Catholics
- ✓ Catholic moral principles are integrated into the teaching of all subject areas
- ✓ Conduct policies are fair and firm and include forgiveness and reconciliation
- ✓ School concerts reflect the Catholic tradition
- ✓ Chaplaincy services are available to all schools, especially secondary schools

## **Justice**

### Indicators

- ✓ People are treated fairly and with dignity
- ✓ All staff members are treated equally and fairly
- ✓ Policies, regulations, rules are fair and equitable to all
- ✓ The variety of cultural and religious traditions in the school and the Division is respected
- ✓ Care of the school/site is shared by everyone
- ✓ Staff is familiar with the social teaching of the church
- ✓ Church social teachings are included in all subject areas
- ✓ Ethical and moral dimensions of all subject areas are emphasized
- ✓ Discipline policies are fair, firm and flexible
- ✓ Peaceful conflict resolution strategies are practiced
- ✓ Community service programs are encouraged
- ✓ School participates in Share Lent programs and other programs that address Third World issues
- ✓ School community is involved in charity activities, e.g. Food Bank donations, Clothing Drives
- ✓ Division facilities utilization policies reflect Catholic social teaching
- ✓ Special needs students receive adequate support
- ✓ The “preferential option for the poor and marginalized” principle is evident in Division and school policies
- ✓ Contract negotiations follow the principles of Catholic social teaching
- ✓ Division supports schools with adequate counseling services
- ✓ School counselors are available to students

## **Hospitality**

### Indicators

- ✓ An atmosphere conducive to learning is maintained
- ✓ Care and concern
- ✓ Signs of welcome are evident
- ✓ Entrance areas are clean and attractive
- ✓ Visitors are welcomed by school/site personnel
- ✓ Substitute teachers are honoured, welcomed and fairly treated
- ✓ Parents are welcome in classrooms
- ✓ Parent-teacher conferences are held
- ✓ Meet the Teacher evening is held at the start of the school year
- ✓ Visitors are assisted with their needs
- ✓ Open House is held regularly
- ✓ Communication among school, home, parish is regular, informative and invitational
- ✓ The quality of language and discourse within the school/site, in the staff room, on the P.A. system and in the playing field reflects gospel values
- ✓ Catholic Education Centre personnel are present and available to schools
- ✓ Telephone etiquette is polite, mannerly and helpful
- ✓ Division policies place people first
- ✓ All staff, students, parents are made aware of expectations with respect to belonging to the Catholic education community

## PART FOUR

### What Can We Do?

To situate the work required to live out the mission of Edmonton Catholic Schools we offer the following:

#### *Meditation*

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.  
We are, quite naturally,  
impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.  
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way  
to something  
unknown, something new.  
And yet, it is the law of all progress that it is made by  
passing through some stages of instability...  
and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you.  
Your ideas mature gradually;  
let them grow, let them shape themselves,  
without undue haste.  
Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today  
what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own goodwill)  
will make you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say  
what this new spirit gradually forming  
within you will be.  
Give the Lord the benefit of your believing that  
His hand is leading you,  
and of your accepting the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.*

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.)

People do look for ready-made answers and recipes for success. The Christian response to difficult situations is first to pass through the anguish of critical reflection and the unpredictability of prayerful discernment.

**a) Resources on Catholic Education**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Popular Definitive Edition 2000

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*Lay Catholics in Schools*. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. Vatican. 1982

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*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. Vatican. 1997

*This Moment of Promise*. Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1989

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