



**Support for Dioceses –
Suggestions for Discussion**

Renewing The Promise

**A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education
from The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario**

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A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education from The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario Suggestions for Discussion



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In light of the release of the pastoral letter, *Renewing the Promise*, school boards and dioceses across Ontario will be looking at appropriate and meaningful strategies to deepen the understanding of this letter in their local contexts.

While this pastoral letter addresses the hopes and concerns for and about Catholic Education in Ontario, it is clear that the bishops' intended audience goes well beyond the educational staff within the publicly funded system to their students and their families and to the Catholic parishes and communities that come together in the home-school-parish relationship.

Here, we propose opportunities and methods to assist bishops and Diocesan teams in developing their own pastoral strategies for the appropriation of the letter as well as potential frameworks for developing a response to the invitation inherent in this pastoral letter.

Finally, we include links to the many support documents being produced to support Catholic School boards in their reflection. Knowing how each of us may seek to engage with this pastoral letter is no doubt a benefit for further development of supportive relationships between parishes and schools.

Sincerely,

Bishop Bergie
Education Commission,
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO)

Practical Planning

A. Opportunities for Reflection

It is essential that priests and by extension pastoral teams be given opportunities to engage in and reflect on the pastoral letter as it is a letter from their bishops which addresses them directly. While an individual may choose to take up such reflection at any time, appropriation of the document and discernment of the diocesan reception of the letter and its challenges to priests is best accomplished in group settings.



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Diocesan structures offer a variety of opportunities for group reflection:

- Priest Formation Days, Priest Convocations
- Presbyteral Council/Council of Priests meetings
- Deanery/Zone meetings

B. Method of Reflection

Here we propose four main elements to include in the reflection. For each element, practical suggestions are given as examples. You may wish to include some or all of these elements into your own diocesan strategy.

Elements of Reflection	Examples of Activity
<p>1. Putting the document in Context</p> <p>It is important to put this document into context, even briefly. This is, of course, the third of the “promise” documents from the ACBO since 1989. So it needs to be understood as part of an ongoing articulation of the bishops of Ontario since full funding of Catholic Education was introduced.</p> <p>It will be important to recognize that this context may be foreign to younger priests, priests not educated in Ontario, and others who may have limited experience with our Catholic Schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide excerpts from the previous ACBO documents that spoke particularly of the challenges of those moments in history and what priests were asked to consider in particular (these documents are easily accessed at www.acbo.on.ca) • show the 37 minute film <i>“Upon Whose Shoulders We Stand”</i> (easily found by Googling “Upon Whose Shoulders We Stand, or at the following link tinyurl.com/y8zo4w5g) that outlines the history of Catholic schools in Ontario and the contribution of religious communities • ask for a show of hands of who has a direct experience of being educated in a Catholic school in Ontario? Dialogue as to whether they were in school during the full-funding debate? What do they remember about the experience? • ask priests to speak about the joys of their experience as pastors in Catholic schools

Elements of Reflection	Examples of Activity
<p>2. Understanding the fundamental articulation of the promise and the response being called for in the pastoral letter.</p> <p>Note: The Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) publication <i>A Catholic Perspective: The More and the More</i> will be a helpful tool here for planners and facilitators as it names and helps clarify the agreed upon challenges from the year-long consultation that preceded the document. There is a recognition that schools ought to be places of sound theology (and they need support here) and that schools ought to be concerned with social justice and outreach (which so many already are).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • point to the fundamental statement of the promise (<i>Renewing the Promise</i>, page 15) “The promise is that this true encounter with Jesus can and does take place, each and every day, within our Catholic schools.” • point to the fundamental questions regarding the response to the letter (<i>Renewing the Promise</i>, page 4) How do we respond individually and communally? How can we respond to the challenges and opportunities? • encourage discussion of perceived barriers to pastors and parishes in fulfilling their role in schools and then strategize solutions
<p>3. Why does it matter?</p> <p>Some basic facts regarding Catholic education in Ontario (2016) may be helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 English Catholic School Boards • 1,652 English Catholic Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1382 Elementary - 270 Secondary • 643,089 students every day in our schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 423,857 Elementary -219,232 Secondary • 80,000 adults supporting their learning in various staff roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 40,709 Teachers - 2,152 Principals and Vice Principals - 207 Supervisory Officers - 2.4 million Catholic Ratepayers <p>Note: a convenient fact sheet on Catholic Education can be found at www.iceont.ca</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research suggests the potential for evangelization (see Bibby and Reid, <i>Canada’s Catholics</i>, 2017) • Consider your own diocesan statement, whether formal or informal, about the potential for evangelization, considering the numbers of adults, children and families touched by our Catholic school system

Elements of Reflection	Examples of Activity
<p>4. What is being asked?</p> <p>While the initial three elements in this model form an important setting of context and rationale for reflection, these elements will probably, for the sake of time, be addressed fairly quickly. The practical work of how we are quick to respond begins here in the fourth section.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading the section addressed to clergy and pastoral teams will be essential (<i>Renewing the Promise</i>, page 21). • Use one or both of the essential images of the document (The Road to Emmaus and the pattern of the Eucharist) to formulate the potential responses (see the proposed outline of activities below).

C. Formulating the Response through the Two Essential Images

The Image of the *Journey to Emmaus* is evident in both the artwork and the articulation of this letter. The bishops lay out the parallels between this story and the journey in our Catholic Schools (*Renewing the Promise*, page 5). The following is a suggested model for responding to the insights from this image. Here, the Road to Emmaus is seen as presenting seven movements (the journey, the encounter, the conversation, the building of trust, the openness to learning, the importance of the Eucharist, and the impulse that leads to witness) which can be in the light of the following questions for reflection.

The pastoral letter refers to the “pattern of the Eucharist” (*Renewing the Promise*, page 19) as an important model that can guide and animate school culture. This pattern, in terms of education, often is explained in four parts (gather the community, tell the story, break the bread, bring hope to the world). As the celebration of the Eucharist is central to the life of priests and, indeed, the “source and summit” of our lives as Catholics, this model has great potential as clergy reflect on their potential response to the pastoral letter in their own context.

Both of these images suggest the need for accompaniment and what one might call apologetics — movements very much at the forefront of discussions in the Church at present. As Bishop Robert Barron reminds us in his ongoing reflections from July 2018, “Why Accompaniment Involves Apologetics,” apologetics implies “giving a reason, providing a context, putting things in perspective, and offering direction.” All of this must happen in the difficult work of ‘walking with’ others. In the models that follow, the reflection moves between the experience of walking with already taking place and the naming of the challenges this shared journey presents for all involved.

The Road to Emmaus as an Image for Catholic Education



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The Movement of the Story	Questions for Reflection
Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who are the people on the journey?• What does it mean that they are walking away from as well as towards?
Encounter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus is on the road in order to encounter the disciples. Where do you need to be in order to encounter the staff, students, and families connected to our Catholic schools? When have you walked with another at a time of uncertainty?

The Movement of the Story	Questions for Reflection
Conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The conversation begins with Jesus asking what they are talking about. How can you engage in similar conversations — that is, to whom and in what contexts can you ask the question: What are you talking about? What barriers exist to listening to one another?
Building of Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators know that teaching cannot happen unless and until students feel safe. How does Jesus build trust with these disciples? How can you contribute to building trust in relationships with administrators, educators, students, parents?
Openness to Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Lord opens the Scriptures to them and explains everything. What are your opportunities to open Scripture in and with the Catholic School community? What are some barriers to these opportunities? How can these barriers be addressed? What are the opportunities for the parish to enter into the learning going on in the Religious Education programs (e.g., <i>Growing in Faith</i>, <i>Growing in Christ</i> program) in elementary schools?
Importance of Eucharist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The disciples recognize Christ in the Eucharist. What are the opportunities for the celebration of the Eucharist? How can you help the school community to recognize Christ in the Eucharist? How can the school community be invited to the Sunday Eucharist more consistently?
Impulse Towards Witness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having recognized Christ, the disciples do not hesitate to return to their community to evangelize and witness. Who are the potential witnesses and evangelizers already present in the Catholic school? How can you support their witness? How can the school staff affirm your desire to witness to them?

The Pattern of the Eucharist as a Model to Guide the Catholic School



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The Pattern	Questions for Reflection
Gather the School Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School communities routinely gather in large and small groups. What insights can you offer that enriches their sense of the importance of gathering or the means of gathering? When and how is the parish present in such gatherings?• When and where are the opportunities for the parish community to see the school community affirmed?• In what ways can you help the community gathered understand themselves in relation to one another (that is in their relation to the Church, the Body of Christ)?

The ICE publication *A Catholic Perspective: A Eucharistic Sensibility* by Richard Olson will be a helpful tool here for a helpful tool for deeper reflection on how the Eucharistic pattern as it may be lived out in Catholic schools.

The Pattern	Questions for Reflection
Tell the Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Renewing the Promise</i> suggests that the story of salvation history is known and shared in our Catholic schools and is a source of encouragement. (Renewing the Promise, page 7) What are the opportunities for the parish to participate in making it known? Where are the opportunities for the parish to participate in the Religious Education already taking place? • <i>Going Deeper — Exploring Salvation History</i> by Dr. Anne Jamieson is a suggested adult Faith Formation activity included in the Institute for Catholic Education Discussion Guide for the pastoral letter.
Break the Bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of what it means to break bread is to create an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality. Where and how does the school experience the presence of the parish in moments of breaking of the bread? Where are the challenges in the parish-school relationship in terms of welcome and hospitality? In what ways can priests, pastoral teams and educators collaborate to develop and propose solutions?
Help Bring Hope to the World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the 'going forth' aspect of the pattern affirmed in the Catholic school? Where are school communities already witnessing well? How can you support or enrich the understanding of witness?
Implications of the Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might a more explicit understanding of this pattern lead all those in Catholic Education; staff, students and families to a deeper appreciation of the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday? Who at the school could be most helpful in enriching the experience of this pattern?

Further Resources for School Supports

The Institute for Catholic Education has published a discussion guide to support School Boards and Catholic Education partners as they work to introduce the pastoral letter into their community. The discussion guide contains a number of sample activities, including information sessions, discussion groups, adult Faith Formation sessions, retreat suggestions, and planning tools.

The discussion guide, and other related resources, may be found on the Institute for Education website (www.iceont.ca)

Artworks*

- Cover Road to Emmaus (Daniel Bonnell at www.fineartamerica.com)
- Page 2 Emmaus 2 (www.carolynnthomasjones.com)
- Page 4 Road to Emmaus (www.robysandanderson.com)
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