

# + A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Renewing the Promise Series | Monograph #2 Fall 2018 | Published by Institute for Catholic Education

## Let the Gospels Lead the Way

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***“Heart, Head and Hands: A Framework for Considering Contemporary Issues in Catholic Education” was the initial monograph in this series. It identified seven contemporary issues in Catholic education that emerged from the “Renewing the Promise” symposium held in November 2017. The monograph proposed a framework as a way of processing and reflecting on these issues. This monograph explores “Moving into Action,” the first theme that was identified as part of the symposium conversation and invites us to focus on the importance of bringing the gospel message alive in our schools.***

“There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the gospel...” (Pope Benedict XVI)

The gospels remind us of God’s love for us, and Jesus’ promise that he will always be with us. Pope Benedict explains it 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.”<sup>1</sup> In our Catholic schools today, “this encounter with Jesus can and does take place, each and every day and educators work together to strengthen Catholic schools as communities that exemplify, in word and in deed, the Good News of Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Gospel teachings open our minds to a world built on love and service and provide models of the true meaning of living in community. The gospels are rich with values that promote inclusion, equity, service to the earth and the welfare of all humankind.

### What opportunities does teaching the gospel to our students present today?

“Young people today are buffeted in every direction by loud and competing claims upon their attention and allegiance. From around the world, they hear daily messages of conflict and hostility, of greed and injustice, of poverty and despair. Amidst this social turmoil, young people are eager to find solid and enduring values which can give meaning and purpose to their lives. They are searching for a firm place — a high ground — on which to stand. They seek a sense of direction, a goal which will give meaning and purpose to their lives.”<sup>3</sup> Catholic schools foster in young people, an appreciation of the goodness of God in the gospels by:

- Engaging the student with the person of Jesus as the center from which all relationships with God, self, others and creation unfold;
- Promoting a way of life rooted in Jesus and called to discipleship and service;
- Offering the student a link to moral and spiritual development;

- Inviting the student to develop their Catholic identity and to love as Jesus loved;
- Nurturing the student to be a compassionate advocate for justice in their communities;
- Supporting the student in understanding their

- Catholic identity in the midst of changing cultural contexts and a rapidly changing society;
- Deepening an understanding of the saving story of our Christian faith.

## Framework for Understanding and Responding to Contemporary Issues

Catholic educators begin with their own story and reflect on how their personal story fits into our faith story. We inspire our students to connect the faith story to their own lives, create a meaning for the present and ignite hope for the future. The framework of “Heart, Head and Hands” integrates our Catholic faith story with our personal story and serves as a vibrant process that empowers us to teach, challenge and nurture our students to feel God’s love. The framework creates an approach for students, teachers, education workers, principals, vice-principals, parents and support staff to respond to contemporary issues.

	HEART	HEAD	HANDS
A Framework for Understanding and Responding to Contemporary Issues	<i>“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8)</i>	<i>“We love because he first loved us.” (John 4:19)</i>	<i>“Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.” (Luke 4:4)</i>
Student	How do I personally connect to the story of Jesus?	What are the myths and facts about the story of Jesus?	Where do I look for Jesus in my community right now?
Teacher and Education Workers	How do I ignite my students’ interest in Jesus?	What are the best resources that I can use to deepen my students understanding of Jesus?	How do I create a safe space in my classroom that nurtures learning about Jesus and student identity?
Principals and Vice-principals	How do I ignite spiritual inspiration in my colleagues?	How do I connect current church teaching about Catholic education to my daily practice while honoring and welcoming each person’s point of view respectfully?	How do I model and build a vibrant faith community in my school?
Parents	How do I teach my child how to see God in all things?	How do I become aware of my personal biases so that I may fully support my child in their faith journey?	How do I model gospel teachings in family life?

	HEART	HEAD	HANDS
Support Staff	How do I best support Catholic education in my role at the school?	How do I support the Gospel values in our school's culture?	How do I infuse these beliefs into my day to day role?
Trustees	How do I remain true to the gospel message in my role as an elected official?	How do I ensure that my public discourse is guided by the truth that Jesus modelled?	How do I make sure that all persons are recognized and respected for their dignity and goodness?
Clergy	How do I touch the hearts of students with Jesus message?	How do I share with students the story of Jesus, Son of God and historical figure who shaped our faith?	How do I help students find Jesus and recognize him in their lives?
Chaplaincy Leaders	How do I support school leaders in shaping the spirituality of the school?	What do I need to know to nurture faith within today's school community?	What can I do to work effectively with school leaders to build an inclusive, faith community?

## The Joy of the Gospel

We are reminded by Pope Francis of 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."<sup>4</sup> Our Catholic schools play an important role in proclaiming the joy of believing as we "strive to join our work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel."<sup>5</sup>

On a daily basis, Catholic schools nurture faith development opportunities in the following ways:

### Directing the learner to the person of Jesus as the center from which all relationships with God, self, others and creation unfold

- Provide opportunities for students to explore the gospel to fully understand the diversity of human experience
- Nurture and prepare each student to connect with Jesus teachings and thrive as a world citizen
- Open their hearts to love as Jesus loved, especially when it comes to loving the poor
- Use gospel stories to support and develop the student's own Catholic identity

- Model inclusive behavior so that the only future worth building includes everyone
- Use Jesus as the ultimate model for inclusive practices
- Capitalize on cross curriculum opportunities to make meaningful connections to the life and teachings of Jesus
- Use resources that reflect that we are one human family sharing a common God.

### Promoting a way of life rooted in Jesus and called to discipleship and service

- Provide service learning opportunities for students to live what we celebrate
- Provide opportunities to bring faith to life by engaging students in volunteer work with parishes, local charities, senior citizen homes, hospitals and food banks
- Use gospel stories to deepen the students' understanding of what it means to be a compassionate and called giver
- Embrace servant leadership opportunities that puts the needs of others first and calls on the learner not only to remember them, but to embrace and serve them

- Support learners in understanding the need to work together to protect our common home and to appreciate the Earth's sacredness
- Ignite student learning with the Catholic teachings presented in the encyclical, Laudato Si, Praise Be

### **Offering young people a link to moral and spiritual development**

- Provide the students with opportunities to build spiritual capital by inspiring and connecting an inner sense of relationship to God, who is loving and guiding
- Use gospel teachings to nurture students to see God, through the sacraments and especially the Eucharist
- Make explicit connections to the Catholic Graduate Expectations when teaching ministry curriculum
- Create time to participate in prayer and reflection.

### **Inviting students to develop their Catholic identity and to love as Jesus loved**

- Connect the students to multiple faith experiences to see themselves as beloved by God
- Provide a range of meaningful activities for students to engage in prayer, understand scripture and learn Catholic church teaching
- Provide multiple opportunities for learners to love God with their hearts, heads and hands and accept the invitation to love their neighbour
- Recognize that the more students understand their faith, the more they will be drawn into deeds of love for their neighbour.

### **Nurturing students to be compassionate advocates for justice in their communities**

- Use gospel teachings to provide the values from which all human relationships develop
- Foster an understanding that the learner works effectively as an interdependent community member
- Develop critical skills on matters of human dignity and common good, so learners can think effectively and creatively evaluate situations and solve problems

- Provide opportunities to deepen thinking by understanding the Catholic Social Teachings
- Involve learners in social justice initiatives and advocacy within the family, the church, the school and the community.

### **Supporting our students in understanding their Catholic identity in the midst of changing cultural contexts and a rapidly changing society**

- Share gospel stories to understand how Jesus addressed changing cultural contexts
- Read gospel stories to understand how they connect to the challenges of our present time
- Encourage the use of critical thinking skills to connect Catholic perspectives to real life problems and solutions
- Provide multiple learning experiences with understanding point of view to give students voice and meaningful entry points into faith.

### **Illustrating an understanding of the saving story of our Christian faith**

- Identify in scripture the saving story of our faith
- Identify in scripture, the person of Jesus whose whole life was one of right and loving relationship with God, self, others and creation
- Design opportunities to bring students, parents and educators together to celebrate the liturgical seasons
- Foster school parish relationships, to deepen the student's faith experience
- Teach the Religious Education curriculum to instill formation rooted in a community that shares common values, beliefs and practices.

## **Summary**

We need to enrich students' faith development by creating learning opportunities to engage them with scripture. By directing, promoting, offering, inviting, nurturing, supporting and illustrating the gospels, we provide experiences for our students to become discerning believers. Pope Francis challenges us to live the Gospel by caring for the poor, working to end injustice and by promoting peace and stewarding the

environment. In a world mesmerized by materialism, with a declining respect for life, Pope Francis calls us to the transcendence of divine love. By bringing scripture alive in our schools, we are reminded that love has no alibi. Scripture grounds our students with examples of our faith, role models to identify with, a contextual demonstration of values, and personal inspiration.

### Continuing the Conversation

Our Ontario Catholic Bishops offer the following reflections and encouragement to partners in education in, *Renewing the Promise — A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*. The Bishops affirm and support each partner in working together as we respond to the opportunities and challenges in this present moment:

#### Students

**“Jesus is a kind and wise teacher and a wonderful healer of all your hurts, who will bring you peace and joy...ask Jesus to help you become a good student, a true friend, and loving son or daughter.”<sup>6</sup>**

Reflect on your relationships, what next steps do you personally need to take to ignite this growth in your life.

#### Teachers and Education Workers

**“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. Recognize that they return to their families and their communities each day reflecting the kindness, love and attention they experience in your care.”<sup>7</sup>**

Reflect and be mindful about the ways that your teaching empowers students to keep Jesus in their hearts.

#### Principals and Vice-Principals

Welcome and include the members of your school community. **“Serve with joy in such a way that those you encounter, are empowered and encouraged in the work of going forth to**

**proclaim the Gospel with their lives.”<sup>8</sup>**

Reflect on your practice, how do you build and sustain an inclusive school environment that welcomes the identities, gifts and talents of each person.

#### Parents

**“In a world that is sometimes beset with negativity and acrimony, remember your example of life, grounded in faith, is a powerful witness for your children. Teach your children to pray and pray with them.”<sup>9</sup>**

Reflect on how else you can model and support faith development with your children.

#### Support Staff

**“Yours is the voice of welcome in our school community. Your model of service and generosity of spirit offers important witness to the values of the Gospel message.”<sup>10</sup>**

Reflect on how your interactions and your role supports the development of Catholic community in your school.

#### Clergy

**“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.”<sup>11</sup>**

#### Trustees

**“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.”<sup>12</sup>**

**“We look to the future of Catholic education with great hope because we are blessed to have so many committed and faith-filled educators and leaders whose witness to faith provides a compelling example to our young people.”<sup>13</sup>**

## References

1. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily from the Mass for the Inauguration of his Pontificate, April 24, 2005
2. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 4)
3. Pope St. John Paul II, St. John's Basilica, Newfoundland.
4. *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel
5. *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel
6. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 16)
7. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 17)
8. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 19)
9. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 17)
10. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 19)
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13. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018 (page 24)

## Monograph Series — Renewing the Promise

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