

+ A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Inspiring Students to Love God More

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This is the fourth monograph in a series exploring contemporary issues in Catholic Education identified as part of the Renewing the Promise symposium conversation. This monograph highlights the ongoing need to rekindle mission and values and to recognize the graced opportunity Catholic schools have to inspire students to love God more.

“As young people growing to maturity in a complex world, you are faced with many difficult and confusing choices on a daily basis. The demands of our consumer driven society and the noise of social media may sometimes leave you to think you are alone. Know that you are never alone. You are the beloved child of God, and he is with you always.”¹

As a student grows and learns about what it means to be human, their experiences in a family, in a classroom and in a community are marked by the relationships they form. Nurtured to be a caring family member, the student learns about relationships grounded in love and respect which impact the way they interact with classmates and community. Inspiring students to love God more comes through caring encounters with others. Through their experiences in relationships students learn about loving and being loved and how to use their heart, head and hands, to make connections to what it means to be in relationship with others. Caring, giving, and forgiving are a synthesis of the experience of loving and being loved. Unconditional love and acceptance, modelled by Jesus, helps to

shape students' understanding of the sacredness of life and enriches their ability to relate to each other. “In a world that may sometimes make students feel that they are not good enough, not wealthy enough, not attractive enough or not special enough, Jesus knows them perfectly and loves them without limits.”²

Framework for Understanding and Responding to Loving God More

“Jesus was capable of continuing to love and forgive in the face of hatred and murder. At the very heart of his self-awareness, lay an awareness of who he was, and how much God loved him. From that source he drew his energy and his power to forgive. We too have access to that same powerful spring of energy. Like Jesus, we too can be that forgiving. In our schools today, this capacity for understanding and forgiveness is needed. To continue to offer others genuine love and understanding in the face of opposition and hatred is the ultimate human challenge. To love God is to love our enemies.”³ The Framework of Heart, Head and Hands assists us to reflect on our love for God and God's love for us provides us with the same 'powerful spring of energy.'

	HEART	HEAD	HANDS
A Framework for Understanding and Responding to Loving God More	<i>Continuing to love and forgive in the face of conflict and misunderstanding</i>	<i>Open to learning that God is love and all people are essentially good.</i>	<i>Providing experiences that engage students to do God's work and feel God's presence in the school community.</i>
Student	How can I feel God's presence?	How do I know God is with me?	What can I do to get to know God?
Teacher and Education Workers	How do I help my students feel God's presence?	How can I help my students love God more?	How do I provide learning experiences that engage students to do God's work?
Principals and Vice-principals	How do I bring joy to my daily work in such a way that those I encounter feel encouraged in their faith?	How do I guide the school community in their ongoing faith formation?	How do I engage the community to be living witnesses of the ideal of service to others?
Parents	How do I model God's unconditional love for my children?	How do I engage my children in prayer that is meaningful to them?	How do I work with school and parish to form my child in faith?
Support Staff	How can I provide welcome to the community that reflects that God is with us?	How can I create a positive, hopeful and joyful presence?	How can I support the school as a faith community?
Trustees	How does my faith encourage those with whom I work?	How do I sustain compassion, wisdom and care in my decision making?	How are my actions an expression of God's love and mercy?
Clergy	How do I accompany the school community in our shared responsibility for faith formation?	How do I share my love of God with the student's I work with?	How do I engage students to encounter Jesus each day?
Chaplaincy Leaders	How do I support the principal in bringing our faith alive?	How do I support the principal in creating a faith filled culture in the school?	How do I model the ideal of service to others in the school community?

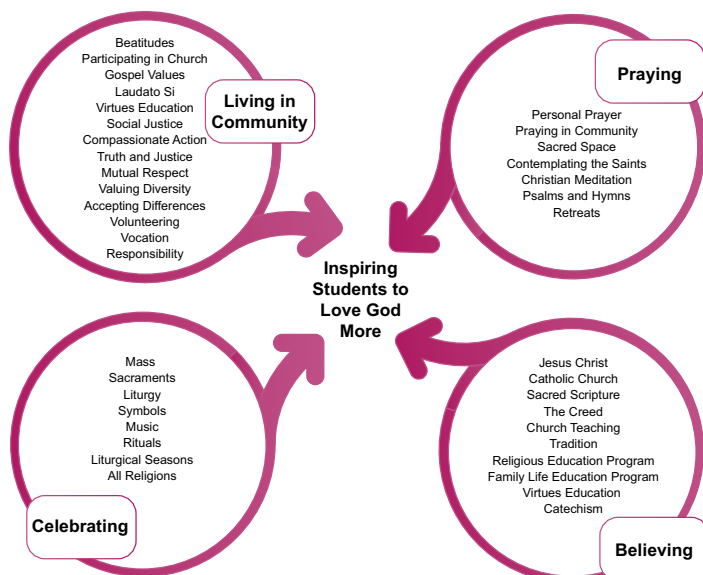
The Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations

The Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations (OCGEs) holistically guide the spiritual formation for all students and describe the hope for every student as they grow in understanding that their purpose in life comes from God (www.iceont.ca/resources/ontario-catholic-school-graduate-expectations).

The expectations are grounded in our faith and understood within the context of relationship. They highlight the attitudes, actions and values necessary for students to engage responsively in 21st century life. The OCGEs provide a common language that is unique to Catholic education. They guide the journey of learning and inspire opportunities for students to engage in a loving relationship with God.

Faith Development Opportunities

In Catholic schools there are abundant opportunities to inspire and support students on their journey to loving God more. The visual representation below highlights a variety of entry points. These possibilities are both expressions of a love of God and work together to inspire students to continue to grow in their love of God.



Summary

Every day in our schools, we continue to help students see the face of God and feel His love in their lives. Educators share their love of God through their own living faith stories, praying, worshipping and teaching the Religious Education curriculum. Educators re-enact God’s revelation in the person of Jesus Christ for each new generation of students and, in addition to telling the story, educators live the story in their daily practice of teaching. This helps students grow in understanding that God loves them, and that God’s love is the model for all humanity. Experiencing God’s love in the classroom inspires students to love one another and provides them with a model to love their neighbour. This is the calling of the Catholic educator.

Continuing the Conversation

God made us out of love and God’s love is the model for all of humanity. Every day in Catholic schools, we are called to the ‘tough’ love that requires ‘right relationship’ with God, self, others and creation. This

is the kind of love that Jesus calls us to give with our hearts, heads and hands. We continually strive to live out that call in each of our roles in Catholic education. In order to address loving God more in our schools, we need to continue the conversation with one another.

Students

Catholic schools invite students to develop a relationship with Jesus and recognize His presence in their lives. Learning to pray provides a sure support and guide and helps students say “yes” to all of the wonderful possibilities of life. Students find Him in the liturgical celebrations of school community and the community itself where they find they are loved and accepted just as they are. This acceptance of self helps the student develop a deeper understanding of the world they live in and their role in making their community a better place.

Teachers and Education Workers

Teaching is a profession committed to inspiring human growth and well-being in students. Through educators own ongoing faith development, they are able to model God’s love for their students and create ways for them to feel His presence and love and to have “confidence in their own abilities to make the world more loving, and more just, through their good works and witness.”⁴

Principals and Vice-Principals

“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.”⁵ Bringing joy, guidance and engagement to all members of the school community starts with understanding personal faith and nurturing their own spirituality. Taking time for prayer and meditation enables leaders to engage in reflection and affirm the promise of God’s love in all daily interactions.

Parents

“God has gifted you with children and you are their first and most important educators. Yours is the task to immerse them in the unconditional love of

God found in Jesus Christ.” Share these words with your children, “you are my beloved child in whom I delight.”⁶ In the family, parents nurture and model a lived faith through prayer experiences and a practiced faith. By supporting and engaging as partners in the faith activities in the school, parents extend and deepen their child’s faith development.

Support Staff

Gracious hospitality and loving service to those who depend on you is yours to give every day. In daily contact with students, support staff can reveal as much about living the gospel as anything heard in the classroom. As ambassadors of Catholic education, opportunities to deepen and nurture their faith help to strengthen their understanding of the service role they play alongside educators.

Clergy

Working in partnership with the school, “your ministry of presence, nurtures student’s faith development”. “Your words of encouragement and support provide invitation for all to engage in the life of the parish community.”⁷

Trustees

Your service as trustees will be as effective as the extent to which you yourselves are willing to be continually educated in the faith.”⁸ Ongoing prayer and reflection on your ministry deepen your call to service. Building community relations that reflect God’s love and mercy is foundational to your responsibility of stewardship in the mission of Catholic Education.

References

1. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018, page 16.
2. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018, page 16.
3. *Rolheiser, R. OMI, Newsletter — November 2018, (adapted)*
4. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018, page 17.
5. *Renewing the Promise, A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, 2018, page 19.
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Monograph Series — Renewing the Promise

Issue	Series	Renewing the Promise Theme	Monograph Title
1	Winter 2018	Framework	<i>Heart, Head, Hands: A Framework for Considering Contemporary Issues</i>
2	Fall 2018	Moving to Action	<i>Let the Gospels Lead the Way</i>
3	Fall 2018	Nurture Community Relationships	<i>Understanding and Cultivating Authentic Community</i>
4	Fall 2018	Rekindle Mission and Values	<i>Inspiring Students to Love God More</i>
5	Fall 2018	Develop Faith and Catholic Identity	<i>Developing Faith and Identity in Our School Community</i>
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7	Spring 2019	Engage Student Voice	<i>Courage on the Journey</i>
8	Spring 2019	Encourage and Nurture Leadership	<i>Shepherding and Serving</i>

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