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A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People | Monograph #7 Fall 2020 | Published by Institute for Catholic Education

A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People: A Caring Family Member

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This seventh monograph in the series, A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People, focuses on how the graduate expectation, A Caring Family Member is foundational for Catholic curriculum.

A Caring Family Member

The “family” is truly the first place of learning. Parents and guardians teach about love and kindness, develop faith, instil values and guide formation. Fundamental to students’ well-being is the experience of belonging in a family. Families are the personal center of each individual. They are made from the heart, come in all shapes and sizes, cultures and identities. To be human is to live in relationship with others. People are wired to connect, and the first connections begin at home. Within the family, the loving care that children experience provides the earliest, most valuable and fundamental lessons about love, generosity, trust, commitment and loyalty. These human connections expand when the student is welcomed into the Catholic school family. Teachers help students to form meaningful relationships with others and grow and develop as God’s children. The partnership between family and school is key to supporting the development of loving, compassionate and respectful students who relate meaningfully to family, school and society.

The Holy Family

Within the Catholic tradition, the Holy Family reflects the love relationships and the challenges of being a family. Like families today, the Holy Family holds onto each other’s lives and supports each other in the middle of life’s messiness. “Jesus was born to poor, homeless parents, a hundred miles from their hometown. His mother Mary knew what it was to be a young adolescent girl and pregnant, betrothed to an older man - who was not the father of the child. Joseph knew what it was to be the focus of gossip and doubtful regard for his ongoing family and social standing.”¹ Mary and Joseph embraced their role

as mother and stepfather and raised Jesus. Like all parents, they were responsible for helping their child grow in faith, for setting an example of how to treat others, for teaching right and wrong and for providing opportunities to nurture gifts and talents. At the root of all parenting and family is “unconditional love.” Like the Holy Family, families today understand the importance of caring for each other and grapple with the meaning and direction of each other’s lives. The complexities within families today often reflect those faced by the Holy Family and like the Holy Family, we hold each other’s lives in love.

Relating to Family Members

Love

The Holy Family models love, which is the cornerstone of all family relationships. Jesus was a loving son to Mary and Joseph committed to fulfilling his heavenly call. Mary was a devoted mother who demonstrated endless acceptance and unconditional love. Joseph was a devoted stepfather who worked tirelessly to love, support and provide for his family.

However, there was nothing easy

about being this 'Holy Family.'

"Mary and Joseph have something

to say to every spouse dealing with lost dreams and an unplanned life."² Mary has something to

say to every woman who has

lost a child in death. Joseph has

something to say to every man

faced with a dilemma of commitment. Jesus has something to say to children about disagreeing with their parents. Their family relationships show that caring family members unconditionally love each other. These important lessons, first learned in the home, allow one to pay it forward and to become a caring community member, engaging with one another in a loving and supportive manner.

Compassion

Compassion is both a way of "being" and "doing" and lives in the head, heart and hands of each person.

Jesus understood and truly cared

about the feelings of others. We

see this in his relationships with

women, the outcasts of society,

the sick, the physically challenged

and the poor. Deeper than

appreciating their point of view,

he took action to demonstrate his

understanding of their emotions

and responded in a compassionate and empathetic manner. Through his example, Jesus shows us what it looks like to relate meaningfully to people from all backgrounds and levels of society and to introduce new inclusive ways of being together in community.

“The Holy Family models love, which is the cornerstone of all family relationships. Jesus was a loving son to Mary and Joseph committed to fulfilling his heavenly call.”

Compassion is key to building loving family relationships and key to building Catholic school communities that care for and support the families and students they serve.

Respect

Respect begins with self. "Encouraging students to value their own word, expressions, ideas, feelings, work, and creations"³ nurtures self-respect. Jesus

teaches that "however you want people to treat you, so treat them"

... (Matthew 7:12). Jesus provides

a model of how we are to be,

and how we are to be together.

In scripture, we see that Jesus

always took time out of his busy

life to stop and let people know

that they mattered and that He

cared for them. He valued people by taking time to listen, and respect their point of view which in his community was countercultural. He taught that disrespect for others was harmful to life in community.

Like society in Jesus' time, society today also has many ways of devaluing people. Catholic educators refuse to be agents of 'negative socialization' and teach students to respect and value themselves.

Respect requires learning to treat others the way you would like to be treated. An effective way of teaching respect is to create an environment where students are encouraged to listen and respect the

word and work of others as well as their own.

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Relating to God

To be human is to be created in the image and likeness of God – created out of love and for love and destined for eternal life. To be human is to live in

relationship. The relational nature of the human person is a reflection of God, who is the supreme model of relationship. It is through their parents and family members that children first learn of God's love. God's love for each of us, his children, is so vast and

so boundless that we struggle to understand. It is through our experience of human relationships, and through the experience of belonging, first within family and subsequently within our broader communities and networks of support that we grow to recognize and to respond to the signs of love in our life. In turn, this understanding helps us to begin to understand God's love for us. As followers of Jesus, we seek to grow into deeper relationship with him, and to grow in our ability to offer unselfish love to others.

Our capacity to enter freely into a loving relationship with God, who loves us first and fully is rooted in very human experience of love and intimacy found within the family and nurtured through prayer.

Catholic Curriculum

Catholic curriculum promotes the development of family values and recognizes each person as a gift of God's love. Respecting the uniqueness of each person and affirming the important role of building a just society is reinforced across the curriculum. Working together, homes, schools and churches are "powerful allies in motivating students to achieve their God-given potential."⁴ The Catholic Graduate Expectation, *A Caring Family Member*, provides a framework for the curriculum to focus on developing each student to be a loving, compassionate,

respectful family member. With teacher support and encouragement students learn and experience the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to make better choices as they grow in understanding of their unique role in society. The core message of Catholic curriculum is hope: "The God who created you, the Son who redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit who lives within you will not abandon you."⁵



The Family Members We Need

It has never been more important than it is in the present for students to be loving, compassionate and respectful family members. Today's families are diverse and remain the center of each persons' sense of belonging. The socialization that occurs in a family helps to build a balance in life. Sharing and celebrating each other's lives, loving each other through challenges and disappointments and welcoming others into the family circle, builds the foundation of how we will relate to others at school and in the greater society. The family members we need "value and honor the important role of family in society."

A Caring Family Member	Family in Scripture	Educator Actions	Family Members We Need
<p>a) Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner.</p>	<p>"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12)</p>	<p>Engage in dialogue and participate as learners alongside parents.⁶</p>	<p>Reach out with heart in hand and a welcoming and patient approach.</p>

A Caring Family Member	Family in Scripture	Educator Actions	Family Members We Need
b) Recognizes human intimacy and sexuality as God given gifts, to be used as the creator intended.	“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)	Instills the message that everyone is a child of God and no one can ever fall out of the hand of God.	Are present with their hearts and called to love and compassion. ⁷
c) Values and honours the important role of the family in society.	“Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 19:19)	Models effective communication between students and parents in the home.	Care about the health, happiness and potential for family members.
d) Values and nurtures opportunities for family prayer.	“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:13)	Prays for students and their families and responds to student needs in adaptive ways.	Give attention to prayer as the experience of God’s love and presence within.
e) Ministers to the family, school, parish and wider community through service.	“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15)	Shapes the students’ way of being in family that is not just about tomorrow but about eternity.	Reveal to each other that they have value, dignity and beauty.

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The Thinking Framework and A Caring Family Member

Each person’s role in the school impacts the student’s growth as a caring family member. One of the ways teachers and school leaders come to learn about students is through connections with the family. Learning about a student’s family relationships supports the teacher in connecting the

learning experiences to the student’s personal center. Understanding the whole student allows learning to be structured in a way that encourages growth physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally; nurtures self-respect and promotes well-being. Catholic Education encourages each student to have a relationship with God and be a caring family member. To support the students’ growth in faith, it is important that educators engage in explicit conversations with parents about spirituality.

Catholic Education in Today’s World

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations manifest themselves as 21st century competencies and prepare students in Catholic schools to thrive in today’s world. Living in the 21st century requires

Thinking Framework and A Caring Family Member	INSPIRE Jesus as role model	UNDERSTAND Understanding Jesus through the lens of heart, head and hands	CONNECT Connecting Jesus' life and teaching to my life experience	REFLECT Reflecting on my role in my family and community	ENGAGE Taking action to improve the common good for myself and the world
Student	Recognizes that they are made in the image of God to live in relationship.	Deepens understanding of self and others as God's children.	Relates to self and others responsibly and with the core message of hope.	Listens with understanding and takes responsibility for one's role in family.	Believes in the journey and knows that in the end, love changes everything.
Educator	Creates a learning environment that is always physically and emotionally safe.	Protects the self-respect and promotes the well-being of all students.	Invites discussion of topics closely tied to students' lives.	Nurtures careful thinking about decisions that have an impact on each other's lives.	Develops the very being of students and embraces identity.
The Catholic Leader	Respects the value and dignity of each individual.	Models compassion and respect and values the important role of family.	Cooperates in a spirit of mutual respect and values parents' perspectives.	Engages parents with a variety of communication pathways.	Communicates the joy and hope of Catholic faith through personal encounter with families.

students to be caring family members. Foundational to living in the world today is that the student honours and values the importance of family. Family life is the personal center for children where they first learn about belonging, love, compassion and respect. The Catholic school becomes the compass, guiding students to live out these values in the school, parish and wider community through service. Confident that they are loved by God, the learner recognizes what it means to be a good student, a true friend, and a loving son or daughter, who is a faithful, contributing member of society.

“A Catholic school must be a place where all knowledge and relationships are transformed by questions of meaning and the quest for meaning.”⁸

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