



***A Place of Honour.  
Reaching Out to Students at Risk  
in Ontario Catholic Schools***



Catholic Association of Religious  
and Family Life Educators of Ontario

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## Introduction

### *A Reflection of Catholic Education's Distinctive Values*

This document is intended as a resource to help Ontario's Catholic educators understand how their outreach to students at risk can be a powerful reflection of Catholic education's distinctive values. As such, it highlights the *why* of our approach to students at risk, rather than *how* programs for these students are concretely delivered. There is no single program for meeting the needs of all students at risk. However, our Catholic heritage provides the vision to approach this task in a distinctive way. Catholic educators creatively continue to develop *distinctive* programs for students at risk, in accordance with guidelines and recommendations set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education and others.

### *Our Distinctive Language and Programming*

The following pages highlight elements from Scripture and Tradition to help guide program delivery for students at risk in Ontario's Catholic schools. But why now? There is growing pressure on us from within and outside the Catholic faith community to justify our existence as a fully-funded educational system, and rightly so. It is important that we demonstrate - with distinctive language, programming and faith witness - what makes us important for society, for the Catholic community and for its young people. This is no less true of our programs for students at risk. These programs provide an important sense of direction for pupils struggling with academic requirements in our schools. Their difficulties are often compounded by the wider crisis of meaning that leaves youth in the West searching for lasting values, a sense of community and hope for the future of humankind. As Catholic educators, our response to this crisis comes from the vision of life that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith provide.

### *Preparing the Hope of our Future*

Young people are important growing members of our society. They are also the future and hope of the Church:

...youth make up an exceptional potential and a great challenge for the future of the Church. In fact the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth.... In this sense the [Second Vatican] Council has defined youth as "the hope of the Church."<sup>1</sup>

We educate our students to be hope for the future of the Church and society by drawing on our professional expertise and religious heritage. This enables us to pass on knowledge and skills in the language and worldview of our faith. The values we hand on to our young people in the name of the believing community are in turn extended further than we could ever imagine through their social interactions, work and family life. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation [\*On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful \(Christifidelis Laici\)\*](#), 1988. No. 46.

way, the distinctive education we provide can bring the Gospel's transformative power to a culture that has come un-moored from its faith foundations.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Addressing the Needs of Catholic Educators and Students***

The needs of three groups are therefore uppermost in mind in the pages that follow:

- ❖ First, there are the **young persons enrolled in our programs for students at risk**. They have a right, as members of the baptized, to be taught their faith in a way that brings meaning to their lives. They are entitled to distinctive Catholic curriculum programming that addresses their needs.
- ❖ Secondly, there are the **Catholic educators called to provide modified or special programs for students at risk** within a distinctive Catholic school context.
- ❖ Thirdly, there are the **Catholic school staff, administrators and supervisory officers** who may not have direct classroom contact with students at risk, but are part of the decision-making processes that shape the culture of our Catholic schools.

It is our hope that this document will help all students and Catholic school board employees to embrace more fully their call to learn, teach and serve that comes from Christ and his Church through Baptism.

### ***Defining "At-Risk"***

The term "at-risk" means different things to different people. For most educators, it indicates a real possibility of failing to obtain a high school diploma. This in turn raises questions about finding meaningful work and becoming a contributing member of society after leaving high school. These are concerns all educators share. We want our students to succeed in life.

Dr. Ben Levin defines a *student at risk* as:

**one whose past or present characteristics or conditions are associated with a higher probability of failing to attain desired life outcomes.**

For Dr. Levin, these outcomes include:

- ❖ **"educational outcomes** such as graduation from high school or participation in post-secondary education"
- ❖ **"employment outcomes** such as positive labour force attachment and higher income"
- ❖ **"social outcomes** such as less involvement in crime"

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<sup>2</sup> See James Mulligan, CSC. "Our Cultural Landscape" Chap. in Catholic Education. Ensuring a Future Novalis, 2005. Pp. 58-82.

- ❖ **“health outcomes** such as greater longevity or reduced morbidity (i.e. incidence of disease).” [bold added]<sup>3</sup>

From a Catholic educational perspective, we might also add:

- ❖ **moral outcomes**, implying the ability to find ultimate meaning and direction in life - something we believe only the believing community’s faith can provide.

Levin emphasizes that “[r]isk is inevitably a prediction about the future based on knowledge of the present.”<sup>4</sup>

Levin also stresses that the “at-risk” identification is only worthwhile if it helps the student; otherwise, it is just another label:

Identifying an individual as being at risk is only useful if the identification in fact leads to improvement. If we do not know what to do to improve a situation, the identification may make us feel better, and may give us a reason –or excuse – for poor outcomes, but it is of no value to the students.<sup>5</sup>

The good of students always takes priority in education. Identification according to risk, ability or disability must be at the service of their growth and development as whole persons.

As educators, we know students in our schools who fit the above *at-risk* descriptions. Their needs and potential are varied. Some struggle with mental illness; others contend with learning disabilities, intellectual and/or physical disabilities. Some come to us having suffered neglect or abuse in the home. Others have had to flee war or are new to Canadian society, culture and the language of instruction. These young persons’ struggles and brokenness reveal to us our own brokenness and need for one another as members of the one human family.<sup>6</sup> They challenge us to see beyond appearances and

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Levin, “Students at Risk: A Review of Research” Paper prepared for The Learning Partnership, 2004. P. 6. See: [http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca/policy\\_research/studentsatrisk\\_by\\_Ben\\_Levin.pdf](http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca/policy_research/studentsatrisk_by_Ben_Levin.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Levin, “Students at Risk” P. 6

<sup>5</sup> Levin, “Students at Risk” P. 8.

<sup>6</sup> This is a central theme in the writing of Jean Vanier. Vanier maintains that we encounter Christ and ourselves in the broken and wounded of our world. Their brokenness reveals to us our own need for belonging, healing and wholeness. They call us together in love and challenge us to embrace our common humanity. In this way, the wounded, outcast and disabled are a gift to the community. See L’Arche Canada Foundation, *Belonging. The Search for Acceptance*. (VHS) Windborne Productions, 2002. This is beautifully illustrated in Vanier’s words:

*Living in community I discovered who I was. I discovered also that the truth will set me free, and so there's the gradual realization about what it means to be human. To be human is that capacity to love which is the phenomenal reality that we can give life to people; we can transform people by our attentiveness, by our love, and they can transform us. It is a whole question of giving life and receiving life, but also to discover how broken we are.*

test scores to recognize their indelible dignity as a son or daughter of God. They look to us for understanding and guidance to help them reach their God-given potential – spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. Our reaching out to these students through specialized programming and assistance thus takes on a kind of sacramental character, reflecting Christ’s desire that they “might have life to the full.” (Jn 10, 10)

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *Who are some of the students at risk I see on a daily basis?*
2. *What are they looking for most from me as a Catholic educator?*
3. *How does my presence to them reflect Christ’s desire that they might have life to the full?*

## **1 Catholic Schools: A Distinctive Approach to Education**

### **1.1 A Complete Christian Formation**

Catholic schools’ outreach to students at risk is rooted in their distinctive approach to education. Our concern for students, including those identified as *at risk*, extends much deeper than preparation for the workplace. This is the position of Ontario’s Catholic Bishops:

A Catholic school can never be simply a place where students accumulate skills and information, a place where they learn how to get ahead and sell their gifts on the open market. If this were so, our schools would prepare students for nothing more than a shallow life far removed from the profound vision of life revealed by the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

We strive to help our students answer the call to Christian discipleship through a curriculum designed to educate them as whole persons.<sup>8</sup> While promoting knowledge, skills and abilities, we stress the importance of witnessing a life of faith through commitment to the worshipping community, to family relationships and to civic responsibility. We help students make academic and career choices and encourage them

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Taken from: <http://www.larcheusa.org/jeanvanier.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, *This Moment of Promise*, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> “The Catholic school, characterized mainly as an educating community, is a school for the *person and of persons*. In fact, it aims at forming the *person in the integral unity of his [sic.] being*, using the tools of teaching and learning where criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life are formed. Above all, they are involved in the dynamics of interpersonal relations that form and vivify the school community.” Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful.*, 2007. No. 13.

to find themselves through self-giving love in Christ-like service to others. Again, the Church provides us with the vision for approaching these tasks:

The Catholic school has as its specific duty the **complete Christian formation** of its pupils... It knows that this integration of faith and life is part of a life-long process of conversion until the pupil becomes what God wishes [them] to be. Young people have to be taught to share their personal lives with God. They are to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific **vocation** to live responsibly in a **community** with others. The very pattern of the Christian life draws them to commit themselves to **serve** God in their [brothers and sisters] and to make the world a better place for [humankind] to live in. [bold added]<sup>9</sup>

This “complete Christian formation” is the context for all programs offered in Ontario’s Catholic schools. The elements of *vocation*, *community* and *service* are important reference points for us as we journey with students through elementary and secondary level studies. Our willingness to honour these elements in their education will impact their ability to make meaningful choices as they move on to life’s next stages in the wider community, college, university or in the working world:

- ❖ **Vocation:** we take great care to guide them as they make life choices – be they academic, career or otherwise – in response to their baptismal call to be disciples of Jesus in the world.
- ❖ **Community:** We encourage them to recognize their lives and future as a gift to the wider community and human family.
- ❖ **Service:** We challenge them to recognize that a meaningful life is not based solely on income, but rather on self-realization through Christ-like service to others.

### ***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *How do I foster a sense of vocation, community and service among students?*
2. *Which members of my school staff embody for me this “complete Christian formation” approach to Catholic education?*
3. *Some of the ways our school contributes to student formation:*
  - *spiritually*
  - *physically*
  - *intellectually*
  - *emotionally*
  - *socially*

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<sup>9</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, [\*The Catholic School\*](#), 1988. No. 45

## 1.2 A Dual Mandate

Ontario Catholic education's distinctive identity is rooted in its unique *dual mandate*:

- ❖ As publicly-funded educational institutions, we must implement course expectations and directives from the provincial Ministry of Education.
- ❖ Our schools are also accountable to the Catholic faith community for imparting its core values contained in the Gospel and in the Church's living Tradition, as expressed in the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations* (See section 1.4)

All our educational programs (including those for students at risk) will reflect the distinctive character of the Catholic school system, whose purpose is:

to provide young people with the knowledge, skills, character development and spiritual formation they will need to be successful in life and in the light of the tradition and teaching of the Catholic Faith.”<sup>10</sup>

## 1.3 Sharing in the Church's Evangelizing Mission

As part of its *dual mandate*, Catholic education participates in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel. It does this through a distinctive curriculum developed and delivered within “a worldview shaped by the Catholic conversation about life's meaning and purpose.” In this sense, Catholic education is “committed to the enterprise of educating the soul.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in every subject area:

- ❖ Catholic Education proclaims
  - a view of life that is God-centered
  - a view of the person that is Christ-centered
  - a view of community that is Church-centered
  - an educational philosophy based on Christian humanism
- ❖ Catholic Education provides
  - knowledge illuminated with the light of faith
  - values formation through Christian community
- ❖ Catholic Education promotes
  - moral and spiritual formation
  - skills development for peace and social justice<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Religion in the Catholic Secondary School](#). 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Trafford, Larry. [Educating the Soul. Writing Curriculum for Catholic Secondary Schools](#). Institute for Catholic Education, 1998. P. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Trafford, [Educating the Soul](#). Pp. 8-11.



## 1.4 The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations

The distinctive character of Ontario's Catholic school curriculum is embodied by the fifty-two *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*. The *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations* reflect the Gospel values at the heart of Catholic education, and portray the ideal characteristics of young men and women graduating from our schools. These fifty-two expectations are divided into seven life-giving arenas:

- A discerning believer formed in the Catholic faith community
- An effective communicator
- A reflective, creative and holistic thinker
- A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner
- A collaborative contributor
- A caring family member
- A responsible citizen<sup>13</sup>

Our distinctive vision recognizes every school activity, subject and programming area as places where the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations* and the Gospel values they embody are made present to students entrusted to our educational care.

### ***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *How do I provide both subject information and faith formation in the classroom?*
2. *How do the believing community's values related to God, faith, morality and justice come through in my interaction with students?*
3. *Who are some of the students or colleagues that come to mind as I consider the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations' seven arenas:*
  - *A discerning believer formed in the Catholic faith community*
  - *An effective communicator*
  - *A reflective, creative and holistic thinker*
  - *A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner*
  - *A collaborative contributor*
  - *A caring family member*
  - *A responsible citizen*

## 1.5 Catholic Schools: Animators of Culture

Catholic schools play a vital role in supporting the vision of life that parents and the parish faith community are called to provide. Sadly, most parents of Catholic school students are not active members of the worshipping community. Their children are largely un-churched, and know little about their Catholic faith. In many cases, their vision of life is being shaped by the influences of what Ontario's bishops call a *post-*

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<sup>13</sup> Institute for Catholic Education, [Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations](#). ICE, 1999. For a complete list of the fifty-two Catholic Graduate Expectations, please see Appendix 1.

*Christian culture:*

We live in a post-Christian culture; conflicting understandings of what it means to be human, and of the purpose and ultimate end of life mark our era. None of us is immune to the effects of individualism, materialism, relativism, and secular humanism.<sup>14</sup>

Catholic educators therefore must not underestimate their important responsibility in helping shape the values by which our students will live. In many instances, we are for them the face and voice of the believing community. We teach them the fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith and invite them to reflect critically on contemporary moral issues in light of Church teaching. Most importantly, we encourage them to embrace the call to a fully human and everlasting life that Christ offers. In so doing, we help prepare them to animate the culture of their time with the truth and light of the Gospel.<sup>15</sup>

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *What post-Christian cultural values and attitudes do I see influencing students in my school?*
2. *What kinds of activities in my school encourage students to embrace the Gospel's values in place of post-Christian cultural values?*

**1.5.1 *Defining Who We are in the World***

There are many ways to define *culture*. To put it simply, culture is about how people express...

- who they are in the world
- who they are for one another
- what is important for them.

Culture deals with how people live together as communities and societies. It includes things like language, dress, food preparation, art, architecture, music, authority structures and social customs. It is a kind of framework, then, through which human values are expressed, reflected and shared by people with a common way of life.<sup>16</sup> These values are

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<sup>14</sup> Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops. [\*Fulfilling the Promise: The Challenge of Leadership. A Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Educational Community.\*](#) 1993.

<sup>15</sup> "The Catholic school participates in [the Church's] mission like a true ecclesial subject, with its educational service that is enlivened by the truth of the Gospel. In fact, faithful to its vocation, it appears 'as a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation', directed at creating a synthesis between faith, culture and life." Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) [\*Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful.\*](#) 2007. No. 3.

<sup>16</sup> The late Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan defined culture as "a set of meanings and values that inform a common way of life." See Bernard Lonergan, [\*Method in Theology.\*](#) Herder & Herder, 1972. Pp. 300-301. The Second Vatican Council speaks about the term *culture* as "stand[ing] for everything by which human beings refine and develop their various capacities of mind and body. It includes efforts to

often so deeply embedded in a culture that they become unspoken assumptions about how we are to treat one another, or more simply, “the way we do things around here.”<sup>17</sup>

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. *How do television, the internet and magazines describe “the way we do things around here” to my students?*
  - What kind of effect are these messages having on students and their cultures?
2. *In a few words, how would I describe “the way we do things around here” in my Catholic school?*

**1.5.2 Our Deepest Values and Noblest Aspirations**

It is only within the framework of a culture that we are able to live a genuinely human life.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, culture must be at the service of all, so that it promotes “the integral perfection of the human person, and... the good of the community and the whole of society.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus shows us the way as a first-century Palestinian Jew, using the language, images and worldview of his time to bring the light of his Gospel message to the world. He respects and honours what is good and true while challenging attitudes and customs that are a stumbling block to love of God and neighbour. As Catholic educators joined to Christ in baptism, we are called to do no less in our interactions with students, colleagues and members of the wider community.

An authentic culture is animated by the noble qualities revealed in the humanity of Jesus, such as the freedom to *love, know and freely choose what is good*. These are intrinsic to our identity as image and likeness of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a communion of life and love. As Catholic Christians, we are called to animate culture with the truth and meaning of human life that is fully revealed in Jesus, preserved in his Gospel, and in the living Tradition of the Church.

Pope John Paul II rightly noted that “at the heart of every culture lies the attitude a person takes to the greatest mystery, the mystery of God.”<sup>20</sup> A truly rich culture can say a lot about who we are in relation to this mystery. An impoverished culture can lead people

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control the cosmos by knowledge or by work, as well as ways of humanizing social life within the family or civic community through the progress of customs and institutions.” Second Vatican Council, [\*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World \(Gaudium et Spes\)\*](#), No. 53.

<sup>17</sup>A definition of *culture* by Liverpool Archbishop Derek Worlock. See Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, [\*Clashing Symbols. An Introduction to Faith and Culture\*](#). New York: Paulist Press, 1998. P. 13.

<sup>18</sup> “It is one of the marks of the human person to reach true and authentic humanity only through culture.” [\*The Church in the Modern World\*](#), No. 53.

<sup>19</sup>[\*The Church in the Modern World\*](#), No. 53.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)*, No. 24.

away from the truth about themselves and about God. This is why culture must be continuously evangelized. Thus:

An impoverished culture...	A rich culture...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ celebrates personal wealth but regards poor, immigrant and refugee, sick or mentally ill persons as a drain on society.</li> <li>❖ regards persons unborn or requiring extensive medical attention as an expendable burden.</li> <li>❖ promotes emotional, physical, state and military violence as preferred solutions to conflict.</li> <li>❖ confuses human freedom with slavery to sexual gratification.</li> <li>❖ sees life's meaning only in terms of setting and achieving personal goals (e.g. wealth, career).</li> <li>❖ regards truth as something elusive, relative to individual belief, and credible only when proven by concrete scientific data.</li> <li>❖ preaches individualized morality and a God removed from human experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ celebrates the riches of living in community, where all persons have a rightful place.</li> <li>❖ recognizes every human life as a sacred and priceless gift to be treasured from conception until natural death.</li> <li>❖ promotes respectful dialogue, sharing of resources, and the tranquillity of a moral order as foundations for true peace.</li> <li>❖ celebrates human sexuality as a sacred gift that empowers us to be self-giving in our relationships in keeping with each person's vocation and state in life.</li> <li>❖ upholds life's holy and eternal meaning, and out of this perspective, encourages persons to develop, grow, and make a positive difference in the world.</li> <li>❖ understands truth as something unchanging and knowable by every person who searches their heart and reflects on life in the light of reason.</li> <li>❖ challenges all persons to universal moral standards; bears witness to a compassionate, caring God who walks with us in our righteousness and sin, and calls all to fullness of life.</li> </ul>

The formation we provide in Catholic schools fosters each student's capacity for critical reflection on culture in light of Church teaching and the Gospel. Broadly speaking, we *educate for citizenship within formation for discipleship* – this is the *raison d'être* for Catholic schools.<sup>21</sup> We encourage a love of the world that is at the service of the dignity and eternal destiny of the human person as revealed in Jesus Christ. We teach students to examine the quickly-fading allure of greed, violence and promiscuity in the light of reason guided by the Gospel and Tradition. We challenge them to move beyond the security of an impoverished culture's *groupspeak* and *groupthink*, to embrace the transforming vision of Christ's Good News.

While we may now only “see as through a glass darkly,” (1Cor 13, 12) we hold fast to the faith we have received (Heb 4, 14), believing in Christ's promise of an eternal life that “eye has not seen and ear has not heard.” (1 Cor 2, 9) We accompany our young people as members of a pilgrim Church, encouraged by the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12,1) who

<sup>21</sup> “Therefore, the formational experience of the Catholic school constitutes an impressive barrier against the influence of a widespread mentality that leads young people especially ‘to consider themselves and their lives as a series of sensations to be experienced rather than as a work to be accomplished.’ At the same time, it contributes to insuring strong character formation [...] capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism” Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful.*, 2007. No. 42.

have gone before us, attesting to the enduring meaning of life and love of God and neighbour. We stand together with our students as “citizens with the saints” (Eph 2. 19), handing on a love for all that is dear to the believing community. We uphold their freedom to challenge one another to be all they can be as disciples of Christ and children of God. In this way we empower them to humanize and enrich the culture of their time.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *I recall a student who has helped humanize and shape the culture of their community.*
2. *I call to mind a staff member who has helped humanize and shape the culture of their community.*

**1.5.3 *Animated by Faith’s Universal Values***

True culture thus “flows ...from the human person’s spiritual and social nature.” It is animated by faith and its universal values. It helps people grow in their “ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense.”<sup>22</sup> It upholds the dignity of every human person and preserves it within the common good.<sup>23</sup>

As witnesses to the believing community’s faith, we teach students to animate culture in many ways: We foster inclusivity in our schools, where all are welcome. We nurture students’ concern for justice through critical reflection on current issues in light of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. We support their efforts to work for a just society with anti-bullying initiatives, extracurricular clubs and activities with a social justice focus. We sponsor their travel to developing countries and ask them to help build international bonds of solidarity upon their return. We encourage students to work side-by-side with staff in support of local food banks and outreach to the poor both near and far. We model and mentor leadership in prayer and social analysis informed by faith. In this way, we empower students to carry the transforming power of the Gospel forward to the world.

**1.5.4 *Building History, Restoring all Things in Christ***

As shapers of culture through our words and Gospel witness, Catholic educators share in the awesome task of “building history,”<sup>24</sup> and restoring all things in Christ. (See Eph 1,10) We recognize that a culture which defines *success* in terms of money, power or social prestige falls short of its noble role of reflecting who we are as human persons. And so,

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<sup>22</sup> [\*The Church in the Modern World\*, No. 53.](#)

<sup>23</sup> [\*The Church in the Modern World\*, No. 53.](#)

<sup>24</sup> Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Letter [\*Novo Millennio Ineunte\*](#) (*At the Dawn of the New Millennium*), 2001. No. 51.

we seek to hand on a compassionate faith to students – one that has the potential to humanize their cultures, communities and society.

We know that our outreach to students at risk can make an immense difference in their lives. The time and effort we spend meeting their program needs models the kind of faith that helps enrich the cultures of our schools. We go the extra mile to see that struggling and voiceless students do not fall through the proverbial cracks in our systems; we challenge them in turn to support one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We urge them to advocate for the voiceless of our world, such as persons unborn, persons who are poor, hungry or disabled, and persons who are politically persecuted. We lead them to be reconciled with God and neighbour for love of the Good News. In all this we are sowing the seeds of the Gospel to transform the culture of a generation, building history and heeding the Spirit's call to *restore all things in Christ*.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *Who are some of the struggling or voiceless students supported by my school community?*
2. *I call to mind a staff member who advocates for the voiceless in my school.*
3. *Who are the students in my school providing leadership to others by modeling the Gospel's compassion and humanizing values?*

## **2. Reaching out to Students at Risk in Catholic Schools: Some Foundational Elements**

### **2.1 Dignity of the Human Person: Made in the Image and Likeness of God**

Our programming for students at risk reflects the distinctive character of Catholic education. The foundation for all our activities is the person and Gospel message of Jesus Christ. By becoming fully human, Jesus affirms the dignity of our humanity, made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1, 27) We therefore approach the programming needs of all students in our schools with reverence for their sacred and irreplaceable value as children of God, made in the divine image and likeness.

Our starting point in student program planning involves recognizing all students as persons. Three implications flow from this basic understanding:

- ❖ All persons (students and staff) share an equal dignity in God's eyes.
- ❖ Each person comes into the world with a unique role to play in the human family.
- ❖ All persons are made for community.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. *Who are some of the students I find most challenging?*
2. *How might I express a prayer for help to see their dignity as children of God, made in the divine image and likeness?*
3. *How does my Catholic school community reach out to include these persons as its valued members?*

## **2.2 Fundamental Options**

The fundamental options that follow explore some of the principles that can guide us as we seek to develop programs and activities that honour the dignity of students in our Catholic schools.

### ***2.2.1 Fundamental Option for the Poor: The Beatitudes and the Last Judgement***

Students at risk are a gift to our school communities. Their unique needs challenge us to enter more deeply into the mind and heart of Christ, and to see one another through the eyes of his Gospel. In the Beatitudes, Jesus identifies with those who do not always fit the worldly success structures of his time: the poor, the mourning, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and those persecuted for his sake. (Lk 1, 1-12) In the tradition of the prophets, we find Jesus identifying with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and imprisoned in his discourse on the *last judgement*. (Mt 25, 31-40) He calls us to do the same, and tells us that we will be judged in accordance with our treatment of the least of these among us. The Gospel and the living Tradition of our Catholic faith remind us that persons not blessed with the riches of academic prowess and a clear sense of direction occupy a special place at the heart of our Catholic school communities. The God-given gift of their presence calls us to help them develop and place their lives at the service of others.

### ***Question for Reflection:***

1. *How do I as a teacher support the needs of struggling students in my classroom?*

### ***2.2.2 Fundamental Option for the Lost***

Our special programs and curriculum modifications for students at risk are means through which we reach out to those who find themselves socially, academically, spiritually or morally disconnected from the life of our school communities. Their needs are a clear invitation to make the way of Jesus the Good Shepherd our own. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus shows us the importance of seeking out these persons and bringing them back to their rightful place in the fold. *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* calls this the *fundamental option for the lost*:

A Catholic school does not just deal with the materially poor. It also deals with the intellectually poor who need our schools to find an education that can break the cycle of despair....

As Catholic educators we have a fundamental option for the lost. This is a relevant and modern response to the world, for it understands one of modernity's greatest problems. We often assume that the worst of all possible scenarios is to be lost. We know, in fact, that this is not true. The worst of all possible scenarios is to be lost, and to realize that no one is coming to look for you. The aim of our Catholic schools in being together to evangelize must always be to ensure that no matter how lost our youth may have become, as long as we have breath to draw, we will never stop looking for them.<sup>25</sup>

The Gospel of Jesus reminds us that all persons share an equal dignity in God's eyes. The poor – whether intellectually, materially or otherwise – in themselves are persons to whom John Paul II referred as a “special presence of Christ.”<sup>26</sup> As such, their needs must take priority in our Catholic educational communities. When these students are lost, it is we, as disciples of the Good Shepherd, who must set out to find and help bring them back to their rightful place among the fold. We must nurture them with programming that recognizes their abilities and struggles and patiently challenges them to grow in their academic and human potential.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *Who are the students in my classroom that seem disconnected from the life of my school community?*
2. *What is their “rightful place in the fold” of the class / the school?*
3. *How do these students challenge me to reach out to them like a good shepherd?*

**2.2.3 Fundamental Option for Community: Re-positioning Responsibility for Success**

The world's individualistic definitions of self-made success can be profoundly opposed to the Gospel. The Beatitudes, the parable of the *last judgement*, the Church's *fundamental option for the poor* and Catholic schools' *fundamental option for the lost* remind us that responsibility for student success lies also with the community. From the Gospel's perspective, communities which do not find ways to put the needs of their

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<sup>25</sup> Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, *Build Bethlehem Everywhere. A Statement on Catholic Education*. CCSTA, 2002. Pp. 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> “Yet, as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them.” Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Letter [\*Novo Millennio Ineunte\*](#) (*At the Dawn of the New Millennium*), 2001. No. 49.



poorest members first cannot be considered a success. As St. Paul tells us, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (1Cor 12, 26)

As members of Christ's body teaching in the name of the faith community, we recognize that student success is closely tied to our fundamental option for the poor, the lost and disadvantaged, who occupy a special place at the heart of our Catholic schools. Our efforts to ensure their place in our educational communities of faith take on fuller meaning in light of St. Paul's words to the community at Ephesus:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Eph 2, 19-22)

Christ is the foundation of all our efforts and successes. Through him, with him and united in his Spirit, we strive to help students become all they are called to be as members of God's holy household, here and now, and into eternity.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *How does the Gospel challenge me to re-think the world's messages about "success?"*
2. *I recall a success story involving a student at risk in my school.*

## **2.3 Fostering a Catholic Understanding of Work**

### ***2.3.1 Work Within our Distinctive Vision***

Programming for students at risk often has a strong focus on preparation for entering the working world after secondary school. Students who do hope to work are entitled to programming that affirms the meaning of their studies. We must also be aware that some of our students may never enter the paid labour force. Helping them find a meaningful place in society is equally important.

Our Catholic faith has much to say about how we present work in our programming for students. Our Tradition tells us that work is always at the service of the human person; it is never the sole goal or purpose in a person's life.<sup>27</sup> We assist students at risk in the

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<sup>27</sup> "Important as work is in each human life, it is not our highest activity. It doesn't begin to compare, for example, with love. We are, above all, capable of knowing and loving God. We can participate in family life. We are able to contribute to political activity and various other forms of service to the common good. As intelligent beings, we possess the ability to appreciate what does *not* come from our work: life, the earth itself, truth, beauty. Our work, if it is well-conceived, can contribute in some way to each of these, but it cannot create them nor take their place.

For some people however work has become the sole activity that gives meaning to their lives. They spend

transition to the working world for three important reasons:

- ❖ the right to work is fundamental to our human dignity
- ❖ work is the primary means by which we support ourselves, our families and society
- ❖ work is a call to holiness

The Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative's *Curriculum Support for Catholic Schools* explains this three-fold understanding of work as follows:

The call to work is **a fundamental part of our humanity, made in the image and likeness of God**. The book of Genesis portrays God as working six days to bring the world into existence. This tells us there is something holy about work. Whether for securing a livelihood or attending to the needs of others, all work is an important way human persons live out their **vocation to holiness**.

Work is a primary way for human persons to express who they are in the world. Jesus, who devoted most of his life to working as a carpenter, shows us the dignity of work and service to others. His modeling of servant leadership calls forth and affirms the giftedness of every human person. Work is therefore more than just a role we play in society. It is a divine call to join in God's ongoing creative activity in the world, and in a sense, **a call to be co-creator with God**. Work thus allows us to participate in the building up of the Reign of God.

Work and service together thus exist **to serve the good of the human person and the common good**. Workers have the right to: meaningful work; safe working conditions; participation in decision making processes which affect their work; security in case of sickness, disability, unemployment or old age; and the right to form unions. The economy and means of production exist to serve people, not the other way around. [bold added]<sup>28</sup>

### ***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *I recall a student at risk who has found a meaningful place in the life of the community.*
2. *Someone I know whose work upholds their dignity as image and likeness of God.*

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all of their energy at work; it is their primary or even their only focus; they sacrifice all things for their work; they derive their identity from their work. This is unhealthy where it is voluntary, and unconscionable where it is forced on people.” Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Working and Living in Ontario](#), 2001.

<sup>28</sup> EOCCC, [Curriculum Support for Catholic Schools 2.0](#). EOCCC, 2005. See Theme: “Dignity of Work and Service.”

### ***2.3.2 Work that Celebrates the Unique Gift of Each Person***

Catholic education promotes a worldview that recognizes the human dignity of all persons. It understands that no one is born into the world by mistake, and that each of us is called to life for a unique and irreplaceable purpose. Catholic educators believe that everyone great and small is bestowed with gifts to enrich the human family. The value of human work therefore, is not determined by the kind of work that a person does. It is the supreme value of every human person who works that makes their labours – large or small, paid or unpaid – important. Work is *always* at the service of the good of human persons.<sup>29</sup>

The school-to-work programming we develop with our students at risk must uphold their value as human persons while affirming their giftedness and talents. Our staff must be able to listen with openness to students’ dreams and aspirations. We must be able to help them discern the call of the Spirit in their lives, so that they may bloom and grow in service to others. This kind of discernment goes much deeper than simple job selection. It respectfully takes into account the valuable insights of:

- ❖ parents and family
- ❖ principals and teachers
- ❖ educational assistants and chaplains
- ❖ professionals and employers in the community
- ❖ when warranted, Pastors.

#### ***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *I recall a struggling student whose presence has been a gift to my classroom / school.*
2. *What are the deepest desires and dreams of students at risk in my classroom / school?*
3. *How do we as a staff listen to the dreams and affirm the giftedness of our students at risk?*

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<sup>29</sup> “...the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one doing it is a person.” John Paul II, Encyclical [\*On Human Work \(Laborem Exercens\)\*](#), 1981. No. 6.

## 2.4 Students at Risk and Vocation

### 2.4.1 *Serving the Body of Christ to Transform the World*

A *vocation* entices us to become more human –a more transparent reflection of God’s image- and of greater service to the common good.<sup>30</sup> Catholic educators recognize the importance of helping students embrace their baptismal vocation to serve the body of Christ and to be a transforming presence in the world. This understanding of vocation brings our programming for students at risk into clear focus in light of God’s greater plan:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but of many. ...But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ...As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1Cor 12, 12-23, 27)

The lens of *vocation* enables us to understand each student’s journey through school and beyond as part of a lifelong process of responding to God’s call. For our part, we encourage each student to develop their gifts and talents as fully as possible, to grow in their unique and irreplaceable role in serving the body of Christ. In a very real sense, then, our programming for students at risk plays a privileged role in the believing community’s efforts to help them understand and move where God is inviting them to reach full Christian maturity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “In keeping with the social nature of man [sic.], the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good, which in turn can be defined only in reference to the human person: Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1905.

“By common good is to be understood ‘the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.’ The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1906.

<sup>31</sup> “...the Catholic school is committed to guiding its students to knowing themselves, their attitudes and their interior resources, educating them in spending their lives responsibly as a daily response to God’s call. Thus, the Catholic school accompanies its students in conscious choices of life: to follow their vocation to the priesthood or to consecrated life or to accomplish their Christian vocation in family, professional and social life.” Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful.*, 2007. No. 40.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. *I recall a former student at risk who developed their gifts and talents to serve others.*
2. *What kind of role in the community does this person now play?*
3. *How has my school helped this student discover her/his vocation?*

**2.4.2 Stewardship and the Call of Grace**

Stewardship implies caring for the gifts God has given us. We can consider stewardship in three interrelated areas:

- ❖ Personal e.g., our health, talents, possessions
- ❖ Communal e.g., our institutions, workplaces, communities of worship
- ❖ Environmental e.g., our neighbourhoods, local communities, natural resources

Our programming for students at risk implies stewardship in all three areas.

At the personal level, we begin by recognizing each student in our care as *gift* to the learning and wider community. We therefore strive to develop programming that best enables them to make a practical concrete response to the forward-movement of grace in their lives. We can help them recognize their experience as part of a lifelong journey of grace that is both *humanizing* and *divinizing*: bringing healing and wholeness, and clothing them with the very life of God.

At the communal level, while the offer of grace invites a free personal response, it is given for the good of the individual *and* community. When seen through the optic of grace, every life, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is a gift of infinite potential to its bearer and to the world. This is why it is important for us as Catholic educators to ensure our students are prepared in the best possible way to develop as individuals who will find their self-realization by serving the common good.

At an environmental level, we recognize ourselves – male and female – as the masterpieces of God’s created order, given dominion over the earth and all its creatures. (Gen 1, 26-31) Creation has been entrusted to us that it may sustain the common good of all persons, made in the divine image and likeness. It is neither to be worshipped, nor is it to be abused to satisfy short-sighted consumer and profit-motivated desires. Our students must be taught to preserve the gifts of creation and advocate for its integrity, to ensure the ongoing well-being of all God’s children.

For the few important years we accompany students along this journey of grace, we can help them identify and become good stewards of the gifts all of us have received. It is important that we ensure prayer and reflection on the meaning of work, service and

stewardship are part of each student's pathway through school and into the next stages of life.

Finally, by supporting and mentoring our students at risk, we are modeling for them what it means to use wisely the gifts God has given us – be they talents, time, relationships, as well as personal and material resources – and to do the same for others.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *Is there a staff member at my school who models for students and colleagues a kind of stewardship that is*  
     *-personal?*  
     *-communal?*  
     *-environmental?*
2. *Is there a student at risk in my school whose gifts are supported and nurtured by the school community?*
3. *What is one way in which I seek to foster a sense of personal, community and/or environmental stewardship in my school?*

## **2.5 Christian Hope**

### **2.5.1 Communicated in Words and Actions**

As Christians, we must “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for [our] hope ... with gentleness and reverence.” (1Peter 3, 15-16). Christian hope is rooted in our belief that Christ has overcome evil and sin's ability to keep us from living a holy, fully human life and making a meaningful difference in the world.<sup>32</sup> As witnesses to Christ's Gospel, our hope as Catholic educators is communicated in words and concrete actions. We thus seek to create schools and classrooms in which young people feel welcome, where their ideas and dreams are supported, and where they are guided to make good choices in life. Parents and students expect nothing less:

... in the eyes and expectations of students and their families, the educator is seen and desired as a welcoming and prepared interlocutor, able to motivate the young to a complete formation, to encourage and direct their greatest energy and skills towards a positive construction of themselves and their lives, and to be a serious and credible witness of the responsibility and hope which the school owes to society.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “[The] story of creation, sin, and redemption ... underlies the Christian story of hope and ought to underlie the basic thrust of its philosophies of education.” Institute for Catholic Education, [Curriculum Matters. A Resource For Catholic Educators](#). Toronto: ICE, 1996. P. 20 (print version); P. 15 (online version).

<sup>33</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) [Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful](#), 2007. No. 22.

The care and kindness we extend to our students at risk speaks volumes about the Good News and its message of hope. Knowing this, we would do well to heed the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: *preach the Gospel always and when necessary, use words*. Hope comes alive for these young persons when they begin to experience real possibilities for contributing their God-given gifts and talents to the good of the world.

### ***2.5.2 Programming for Students at Risk: an Expression of Hope***

Our programming for students at risk is a concrete act of hope that springs from a living faith.<sup>34</sup> We believe in the dignity of each student in our classrooms; we recognize their faces and needs as the face and needs of Christ. We know that the time we take making contacts with other programming staff, employers and mentors on their behalf lends credible witness to the faith we profess, and helps spread hope throughout the school and local community. A hope-filled student's presence says to other students: "God does have a place for me in this world and a place for you too!" A hope-filled student's presence says to staff: "I believe in you and all you stand for because you have shown me that you believe in me!" A hope-filled student's presence in the local community says: "I am here because you believe I belong here, and have something unique, beautiful and irreplaceable to offer the world." The presence of a hope-filled student reminds the school and community that their success is revealed in the way they treat those who struggle in their midst.

### ***2.5.3 Fostering Hope: an Act of Empowerment***

We cannot underestimate the confidence and hope that a meaningful future brings to a young human heart. Fostering hope among those with whom Jesus identifies most closely in the Beatitudes and at the last judgement is a tremendous act of empowerment. Our care and concern for students at risk can be a kind of sacramental presence through which God's care and concern for them are made real.

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<sup>34</sup> "Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man [sic.] has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain."

"Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is 'truly' life."  
Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Saved by Hope (Spe Salvi)*, 2007. Nos. 30, 31.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. I recall a student at risk who has been given hope by programming in my school.
2. One way I try to help students at risk come to a place of hope in their studies and personal life is...

**2.6 Transforming the World in Christ**

We recognize that the ordinary relationships and activities in our personal and professional lives are channels through which the salt, light and leavening power of the Gospel can transform the world.<sup>35</sup> By helping students find creative ways to move forward in their education, work prospects and life choices, we become co-operators with God's ongoing creative activity in the world – in a sense, co-creators with God – teaching our students to do the same:

By our labour we are unfolding the Creator's work and contributing to the realization of God's plan on earth. The Christian message does not stop us from building the world or make us neglect our fellow human beings. On the contrary it binds us more firmly to do just that.<sup>36</sup>

The distinctive character of our programming for students at risk is therefore an important way in which Catholic educators, as members of the laity, exercise their baptismal call to transform the world in Christ.

It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.<sup>37</sup>

The laity's efforts to spread the Gospel are largely responsible for the future of the Church.<sup>38</sup> The work of our Catholic schools, rooted in the Gospel message, is an important means through which this task of evangelization is carried out in our communities. Our concrete attempts to bring faith's meaning to struggling students' lives through distinctive Catholic programming, acts of kindness and concern for their welfare are powerful avenues through which God's grace is at work, building up the Church, bringing wholeness and hope, and transforming the world one person at a time.

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<sup>35</sup> The Church uses the images of *salt*, *light* and *yeast* to illustrate the transformative power of the baptized in the world. See Vatican II, [\*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church \(Lumen Gentium\)\*](#) Chapter IV: The Laity, No 31-37.

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical [\*On Human Work \(Laborem Exercens\)\*](#), 1981. No. 5

<sup>37</sup> Second Vatican Council. [\*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church \(Lumen Gentium\)\*](#), No. 31

<sup>38</sup> "The lay faithful should thus be conscious of their baptismal dignity. For their part, Pastors should have a profound respect 'for the witness and evangelizing work of lay people who, incorporated into the People of God through a spirituality of communion, lead their brothers and sisters to encounter the living Jesus Christ. The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church'" (Propositio 54). Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, [\*Ecclesia in America\*](#), No. 44.



**Questions for Reflection:**

1. *I recall a struggling student whose life has been transformed by my school community's show of care for them.*
2. *One transforming impact that students in my Catholic school have had on their local community and world is...*
3. *I remember an experience when I, as a Catholic educator, saw the transforming influence of my work and witness on students.*

### **3. Pathways to Success**

The term *pathway* can be used on many levels. A pathway can be a physical structure, like a trail through a forest; it can be more figurative, as in referring to a way of life or a set of religious practices. There are also pathways that imply programs of career studies. In all cases, pathways involve a journey and a destination.

The Ontario Ministry of Education developed its *Pathways to Student Success* guidelines in response to the needs of students who are at risk for obtaining a high school diploma. Its two principal guiding documents are:

- *Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7 - 12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group*
- *An Educator's Guide to Program Pathways.*<sup>39</sup>

The goal of the *Pathways* programs is to help these students remain in school and make a successful transition from senior elementary and secondary level education and into the working world.

#### **3.1 The Pathways Call to Re-Culture Our Schools**

Ontario's Ministry of Education has called for a re-culturing of schools to allow its *Pathways to Success* programs to take root and have a positive effect in its publicly funded education systems. Authentic re-culturing and development of *Pathways* programs for Catholic schools will be guided by the vision and values that make us distinctive. In the past, student success tended to be measured by the level of courses taken and whether they were destined for college or university. This limited model

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<sup>39</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, [\*Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7 - 12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group\*](#) and [\*An Educator's Guide to Program Pathways.\*](#) Draft September, 2005.

excluded students at risk from being labelled a *success*. The Ministry of Education describes its new approach as follows:

We may think of this change in outlook as a “**re-culturing**” of our schools. In creating the right conditions in which such re-culturing can occur, we need to rethink what it means to support students who are considered at risk. They need program pathways that are clearly aligned with their strengths and learning styles rather than those in which they struggle to keep up with their peers. Students (and their parents) must see their courses and programs as viable and credible, enabling them to achieve educational goals that fit well with their life goals, not as something they must do because they are failing to make the grade. An education program that “provides all students with the learning opportunities and support they need” (OSS, p. 6) must surely address these concerns.<sup>40</sup>

The call to re-culture our schools must be seen by Catholic educators as an invitation to renew our commitment to all students, regardless of academic ability. The reality is that some of them may never go on to work, college or university. For others, their experience of being *at-risk* is transitory, and they need someone to accompany them through this stage in their educational journey. Others yet may grow to exceed our wildest expectations. We must therefore resist at all costs the temptation to associate students with permanent labels. In this way we remain open to what God’s mysterious and infinite grace is looking to do in their lives.

Our approach to Pathways programs in Catholic schools will promote the vision of life, human love and society as revealed in the person of Jesus and his Gospel, and taught in the living Tradition of the Church. Our understanding of *vocation, community* and *service to humanity* discussed earlier in this document are important parameters which need to guide us in this task.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *Which messages about worldly success present a struggle to students at risk in my classroom?*
2. *How can I promote a more Gospel-based understanding of success with students at risk (and others) in my classroom?*

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<sup>40</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, [\*Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7 - 12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group\*](#) . Queen’s Printer, 2003. P. 11.

### 3.1.1 *Three Integral Elements*

The Ministry of Education highlights the following three elements as integral to the *Pathways to Success* program:

- “**awareness-raising activities** and **opportunities for exploration** [of workplace options] in grades 7 to 10, and **opportunities for commitment** [to workplace related activities] in grades 11 and 12.”
- **opportunities to help students develop literacy, numeracy, life and employability skills** in a variety of course settings (e.g. applied, academic, open, locally-developed, workplace preparation, university and college preparation courses)
- an **experiential learning component** which brings students into contact with representatives of various trades and industries, allowing for job-related experience in the prospective fields of employment.<sup>41</sup>

Catholic education’s distinctive vision frames our approach to these elements within a context that goes beyond workplace preparation. It tells us that every person comes into the world with a precious, unique and irreplaceable role to play in God’s plan for the human family. While some of our students may never be able to secure paid work, we uphold their value as persons and members of our school communities. We journey with them to help them make the best possible choices for meaningful lives as valued members of society.

### 3.1.2 *Ministry of Education Guidelines*

The guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education for the *Pathways to Success* program are summarized below:

1. Ontario schools should offer an education program that promotes a high standard of achievement that provides all students with the learning opportunities and support they need, and that is relevant to society’s needs and expectations.
2. Ontario schools should provide pathways for success for all students at risk.
3. Actively removing systemic barriers to success and challenging prevailing attitudes must be key priorities for all Ontario school boards and education partners.
4. All program pathways will provide students with ongoing opportunities to change and revise goals, directions, and destinations.
5. Building pathways for success is a whole school, whole board responsibility.
6. The development of successful program pathways for students at risk is built upon a foundation of comprehensive, coordinated career education/guidance programs.
7. Effective program pathways will include a broad range of experiential learning opportunities.

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<sup>41</sup> [\*Building Pathways to Success: Final Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group.\*](#) P. 10.

8. In order to be successful, program pathways will engage parents.
9. Community partners must be encouraged and challenged to work with educators to build and support program pathways.
10. Leadership at all levels is the key to successful implementation of program pathways.
11. Ensuring effective ongoing communication among all education partners is critical to building and supporting relevant, viable, and up-to-date program pathways.
12. Effective teacher training strategies are fundamental to successful implementation of program pathways.<sup>42</sup>

Effective *Pathways to Success* programs in Ontario Catholic schools will employ the above three elements and twelve principles within a distinctive Catholic educational context as described throughout this document and elsewhere.

***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *How do the concrete school-to-work partnerships my students are involved in reflect Catholic education's distinctive values?*
2. *Which lasting values do I, as a Catholic educator, want our students to bring away from their Pathways experiences?*

#### **4. Religious Education for Students at Risk**

We have looked at how the distinctive character of our Catholic school programming is shaped by the *Catholic conversation about life's meaning and purpose*. In a very real sense, the Catholic faith is taught in all school activities and subject areas, including those developed for our students at risk. Indeed, all our programs of study are delivered in a distinctive Catholic educational context whose purpose is to:

- ❖ develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity;
- ❖ enable young people, while developing their own personality, to grow ... in that new life ... given them in baptism;
- ❖ orientate the whole of human culture to the message of salvation.<sup>43</sup>

As Catholic educators, we uphold the right of every member of the baptized to receive explicit instruction in the Catholic faith. This is the fundamental task of our Religious Education programs. Religious Education therefore stands at the centre of what we are all about in Catholic schools; it will always be a cornerstone of our students' educational experience.

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<sup>42</sup> [\*Building Pathways to Success: Final Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group\*](#). Pp. 11-12.

<sup>43</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, [\*General Directory for Catechesis\*](#), No. 259.

We have to find creative ways to satisfy Religious Education expectations for our students at risk, while meeting their unique programming needs. It will be helpful to integrate community service and co-operative education into their Religious Education experience. Our guidelines for this task are set out in the following sections of the *Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum Policy Document for Religious Education*:

- Section 3 *Program Considerations*, especially 3.3 (Assessment and Evaluation),
  - 3.4 (Guidance and Career Education),
  - 3.5 (Meeting the Needs of All Students)
  - 3.7 (Modes of Delivery)
    - under 3.7.1 (Community Service)
    - 3.7.2 (Co-operative Education).<sup>44</sup>

By making Religious Education a priority for our students at risk, we affirm their dignity as members of the baptized, commissioned by Christ and his Church to be witnesses to the Good News. The religious knowledge and values they receive through our Religious Education programs help them go forward with self-confidence as persons called and uniquely gifted to better the world. By adapting our Religious Education programming to their needs, we are helping them find deep and lasting meaning in their study, work and life. In this way, we help them to live as salt, light and leaven for sake of the Gospel, transformers of culture, builders of history, contributors to the common good and servants to the body of Christ.

### ***Questions for Reflection:***

1. *How have I accommodated Religious Education programs for students at risk in my class?*
2. *What have these accommodations helped provide them for their journey forward in life?*

## **Conclusion**

### ***The Eucharistic Community: Our Model***

All that has been said about Catholic education in the previous pages finds its perfect expression in the life of the Eucharistic community. In the Acts of the Apostles, we find the post-Pentecost assembly of believers living in oneness of heart and mind, united in the preaching of the Word and in the breaking of the bread. (See Acts 2, 42-47; 4, 32-37) As the community grows, deacons are ordained to see that food is distributed to the community's widows, their children and the poor. (See Acts 6, 1-6)

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<sup>44</sup> Institute for Catholic Education, [Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum Policy Document for Religious Education](#), 2006. P. 30-31.

From its earliest times, the believing community has placed the needs of its struggling members at the heart of its concerns. This tradition continues to the present; it is echoed each time our Catholic schools reach out to students in difficulty and to persons beyond our walls. Pope Benedict XVI affirms this link between Eucharist and the concrete expression of charity in his recent encyclical *God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*:

“[w]orship” itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, ...the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.<sup>45</sup>

Christ, who loves us first, calls us to do the same, offering us his very self to sustain us in our labours.

### ***The Eucharistic Nature of Catholic School Communities***

As Catholic educators, our school communities are rooted in the local Church and its parish communities.<sup>46</sup> Our love for struggling students and members of the wider community draws sustenance from Eucharist, reminding us that Eucharist is more than something we *do* on Sundays. For the believing community, it is a way of life. Our Sunday encounter with Christ in the praying assembly, the person of the minister, the Gospel and sacramental elements under the appearance of bread and wine provides us the spiritual nourishment to live a Eucharistic life. This nourishment enables us to live as *body of Christ* in our homes, in the marketplace and in our schools, giving a place of honour to persons in greatest need of our help. The words of St. Paul to the Eucharistic community at Corinth again ring true for us as a Eucharistic people who reach out to students at risk in Catholic schools:

[T]he members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1Cor 12, 22-27)

We may not often see the fruits of seeds we sow in students’ lives. However, the harvest is the Lord’s, and we are the labourers. We stand grateful and proud that the distinctive

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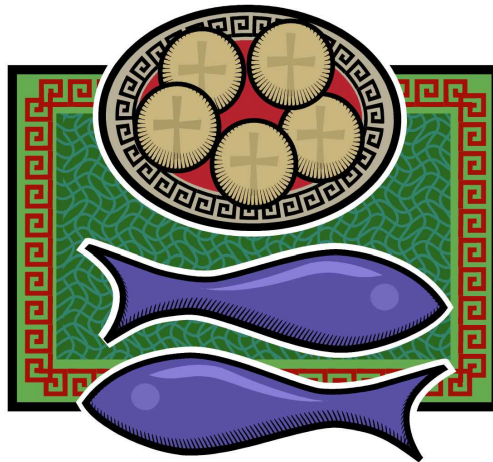
<sup>45</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical [\*God is Love \(Deus Caritas Est\)\*](#), No. 14.

<sup>46</sup> “Catholic education promotes a view of community that is Church centered.” Trafford, [\*Educating the Soul\*](#). 12.

Catholic programs we develop for students at risk are helping prepare young persons for meaningful lives that go on forever. In faith, we draw strength from our baptismal union with Christ and his Church; we are nurtured and in turn, nurture one another as members of Eucharistic communities. We trust that with the Spirit's guidance, our efforts to educate in the light of faith are helping young persons in our Catholic schools transform the world in Christ. This is what makes Catholic education so important, and so worthwhile.

***Questions for Reflection:***

- 1. I call to mind a colleague whose loving outreach to students reflects Christ's love encountered in the Eucharist.*
- 2. I recall a time when the Eucharistic character of my school community was clearly witnessed in acts of love.*



***A Place of Honour.***  
***Reaching out to Students at Risk in Ontario Catholic Schools***  
**Executive Summary**

Tony Cosentino, Renfrew County Catholic District School Board  
 Joe Bezzina, London District Catholic School Board

Reverence for the dignity of all persons, made in the image and likeness of God lies at the heart of programming for students in our Catholic schools. Catholic education's distinctive programming calls all staff to share responsibility for student education and formation, for integrating the worshipping community's faith into every subject and aspect of school life. In this way, Catholic schools help students embrace their baptismal call to be fully alive in Christ. Therefore, all Catholic school programs, especially those that reach out to students in need, must:

**1. Uphold the dignity of the human person as image and likeness of God:**

Authentic Catholic school programming bears a healthy Christian understanding of what it means to be human (i.e. a healthy Christian anthropology). This is expressed in our concern for the whole person – for their spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional and social well-being. We recognize each student as a gift to our school communities, and provide a place of honour to the ones who struggle in our midst. Our witness is a reminder that all persons are sacred, and have irreplaceable value in the Body of Christ.

**2. Respect Catholic Education's *dual mandate*:**

Catholic Education makes a unique contribution to public life by:

- implementing course expectations and directives from Ontario's Ministry of Education *and*
- actively sharing in the Church's evangelizing mission.

All who are involved in Catholic Education are accountable to the Ministry of Education *and* to the Catholic faith community. All are responsible for the integrity of Catholic Education's distinctive curriculum. This distinctiveness is expressed in the language and vision of the Gospel and the Church's living Tradition.

**3. Invite all staff to assume their shared responsibility for students' education:**

Students at risk occupy a special place in our Catholic school communities. We recognize our fundamental responsibility to reach out to those in need. To do this effectively, we must all be involved.



***A Place of Honour.***  
**Executive Summary (Cont'd)**

**4. Challenge students to grow and live life to the fullest:**

We challenge students, through our programming and witness, to live the Gospel –

- to integrate faith and life,
- to become caring family members and responsible citizens,
- to lovingly serve the needs of others,
- to reflect critically on life issues through the lens of the Gospel,
- to contemplate, imagine and change the world for the better,
- to develop their character and grow spiritually,
- to grow in knowledge, skills and abilities
- to use their gifts in life and at work
- to be life-long learners.

**5. Be distinctively rooted in Gospel values:**

Our programs must recognize all people's call to holiness. They must encourage all students to embrace their role in humanizing and shaping culture with the values of our faith. Our programs for students at risk define success in terms of embracing one's vocation, rather than in terms of money, power or social prestige. They defend the dignity of every person and promote the common good. In this way, they develop in each student a social conscience that makes a preferential option for the poor.

Our programs preparing students to enter the world of work must have a Catholic understanding of work and workers in God's plan for humanity. Human work is fundamental to our dignity as image and likeness of the God who worked six days to bring creation into existence and rested on the seventh. Work is a call to holiness, within which we support our families and the common good. The value of work is rooted in the supreme worth of the person who labours, and not in the kind of work that she or he does. Work therefore, must never be demeaning, for through our labours – each in our own small way – we can transform the world with the power of the Gospel.

**6. Reflect a Eucharistic Vision of Life**

The Eucharistic community is the model for our mission as Catholic educators. The care of the first Eucharistic communities for their poor and needy members is echoed in our attentiveness to the needs of students at risk in our schools. We draw life from our Eucharistic encounter with Christ in order to live and work together as his body. Eucharist is the spiritual nourishment that enables us to live out the call of baptism. It empowers us to reach out to all students with the heart and mind of Jesus and form them to be his disciples.

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## **Appendix 1. Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations**

<b>The graduate is expected to be:</b>	
<b>1. A Discerning Believer Formed in the Catholic Faith Community</b> who	
<b>CGE1a</b>	-illustrates a basic understanding of the <b>saving story</b> of our Christian faith;
<b>CGE1b</b>	-participates in the <b>sacramental life</b> of the church and demonstrates an understanding of the centrality of the Eucharist to our Catholic story;
<b>CGE1c</b>	-actively reflects on <b>God’s Word</b> as communicated through the Hebrew and Christian scriptures;
<b>CGE1d</b>	-develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic <b>social teaching</b> and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good;
<b>CGE1e</b>	-speaks the <b>language of life</b> ... “recognizing that life is an unearned gift and that a person entrusted with life does not own it but that one is called to protect and cherish it.” (Witnesses to Faith)
<b>CGE1f</b>	-seeks intimacy with God and celebrates <b>communion</b> with God, others and creation through prayer and worship;
<b>CGE1g</b>	-understands that one’s purpose or <b>call in life</b> comes from God and strives to discern and live out this call throughout life’s journey;
<b>CGE1h</b>	-respects the <b>faith traditions</b> , world religions and the life-journeys <b>of all people of good will</b> ;
<b>CGE1i</b>	-integrates faith with life;
<b>CGE1j</b>	-recognizes that “sin, human weakness, conflict and forgiveness are part of the human journey” and that the cross, the ultimate sign of forgiveness is at the heart of <b>redemption</b> . (Witnesses to Faith)
<b>2. An Effective Communicator</b> who	
<b>CGE2a</b>	-listens actively and critically to understand and learn in light of gospel values;
<b>CGE2b</b>	-reads, understands and uses written materials effectively;
<b>CGE2c</b>	-presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others;
<b>CGE2d</b>	-writes and speaks fluently one or both of Canada’s official languages;
<b>CGE2e</b>	-uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life.
<b>3. A Reflective and Creative Thinker</b> who	
<b>CGE3a</b>	-recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges;
<b>CGE3b</b>	-creates, adapts, evaluates new ideas in light of the common good;
<b>CGE3c</b>	-thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems;
<b>CGE3d</b>	-makes decisions in light of gospel values with an informed moral conscience;
<b>CGE3e</b>	-adopts a holistic approach to life by integrating learning from various subject areas and experience;
<b>CGE3f</b>	-examines, evaluates and applies knowledge of interdependent systems (physical, political, ethical, socio-economic and ecological) for the development of a just and compassionate society.
<b>4. A Self-Directed, Responsible, Life Long Learner</b> who	
<b>CGE4a</b>	-demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others;
<b>CGE4b</b>	-demonstrates flexibility and adaptability;
<b>CGE4c</b>	-takes initiative and demonstrates Christian leadership;
<b>CGE4d</b>	-responds to, manages and constructively influences change in a discerning manner;

<b>CGE4e</b>	-sets appropriate goals and priorities in school, work and personal life;
<b>CGE4f</b>	-applies effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, time and resource management skills;
<b>CGE4g</b>	-examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities;
<b>CGE4h</b>	-participates in leisure and fitness activities for a balanced and healthy lifestyle.
<b>5. A Collaborative Contributor</b> who	
<b>CGE5a</b>	-works effectively as an interdependent team member;
<b>CGE5b</b>	-thinks critically about the meaning and purpose of work;
<b>CGE5c</b>	-develops one's God-given potential and makes a meaningful contribution to society;
<b>CGE5d</b>	-finds meaning, dignity, fulfillment and vocation in work which contributes to the common good;
<b>CGE5e</b>	-respects the rights, responsibilities and contributions of self and others;
<b>CGE5f</b>	-exercises Christian leadership in the achievement of individual and group goals;
<b>CGE5g</b>	-achieves excellence, originality, and integrity in one's own work and supports these qualities in the work of others;
<b>CGE5h</b>	-applies skills for employability, self-employment and entrepreneurship relative to Christian vocation.
<b>6. A Caring Family Member</b> who	
<b>CGE6a</b>	-relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner;
<b>CGE6b</b>	-recognizes human intimacy and sexuality as God given gifts, to be used as the creator intended;
<b>CGE6c</b>	-values and honours the important role of the family in society;
<b>CGE6d</b>	-values and nurtures opportunities for family prayer;
<b>CGE6e</b>	-ministers to the family, school, parish, and wider community through service.
<b>7. A Responsible Citizen</b> who	
<b>CGE7a</b>	-acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions;
<b>CGE7b</b>	-accepts accountability for one's own actions;
<b>CGE7c</b>	-seeks and grants forgiveness;
<b>CGE7d</b>	-promotes the sacredness of life;
<b>CGE7e</b>	-witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful and compassionate society;
<b>CGE7f</b>	-respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures;
<b>CGE7g</b>	-respects and understands the history, cultural heritage and pluralism of today's contemporary society;
<b>CGE7h</b>	-exercises the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship;
<b>CGE7i</b>	-respects the environment and uses resources wisely;
<b>CGE7j</b>	-contributes to the common good.