

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By

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CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

Inaugural Meeting of the Board
Tuesday, December 4, 2018

“The message of Bethlehem is a message of peace, joy and hope. Bethlehem is the place of birth, of the Saviour’s birth. It is, therefore, the symbol of new beginnings, the dawning of a new era, the breaking in of a new time, the opening up of new possibilities, the stirring of new hope.”

Your Excellency Bishop Crosby, special guests, fellow Trustees, Mr. Hansen, Student Trustee Malcew, family members, ladies and gentlemen:

The words from our dear Adult Faith Animator Emeritus Jerry Creedon’s 1992 Christmas Message focus us on the central purpose of our faith and of Catholic Education as one of new beginnings of true hope (the communication of Christ). Throughout my years as a Catholic School Trustee I have reflected on the appropriateness of the first meeting, particularly the Inaugural Meeting of a Catholic School Board taking place during the season of Advent. It recalls for me the season of Advent as one of expectant hope and our coming together as one of New Beginning.

I would like to comment on what for me are four recent signs of this moment as one of hope and new beginning and conclude with the suggestion/recommendation of four priorities over this term of office.

SIGNS OF NEW BEGINNING:

- New Board of Trustees;
- New By-Laws / committee structures;

- The development of our Board's/System's 2019-2022 Multi-Year Strategic Plan;
and
- The Ministry of Education's 2019/2020 Funding Engagement Guide.

2018-2022 Priorities

- Catholic Identity
- Stewardship
- Well-Being of Staff
- Catholic Christian Community

NEW BOARD OF TRUSTEES

In their (2018) Pastoral Letter “Renewing the Promise,” the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO), in speaking directly to Catholic Trustees, to each of us writes:

“You are entrusted with the profound responsibility of stewardship of the mission of Catholic Education. Let the Gospel of Jesus guide your policies and your governance of our Catholic school districts for in his Gospel the Church discovers truth, goodness and beauty.”

Throughout its 166-year history, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has been comprised of men and women who have generously responded to this call.

Continuing this wonderful tradition of service, we just publicly promised to:

- (i) Give wholehearted commitment to Catholic Education and to building and nurturing education communities well-grounded in our Catholic Faith and rooted in Jesus Christ;

- (ii) Be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church, and to work to ensure that Christ remains at the centre of all we do as Catholic school trustees.

It is my honour at this time on behalf of my fellow trustees and indeed our entire Catholic school system to congratulate and welcome in a special way those joining the Board this term:

- Mr. Louis Agro (Ward 9 & 11)
- Mr. Philip Homerski (Ward 12 & 13)

We look forward to hearing your new/fresh perspectives and serving with you as we fulfill our fourfold role as advocates, stewards, politicians and servant leaders.

NEW BOARD BY-LAWS/COMMITTEE STRUCTURES

The previous Board's wisdom in reviewing and renewing our By-Laws and committee structure direct us to a new beginning to the manner in which we develop policy. In particular, the establishment of separate committees focusing on Student Achievement and Well-Being, Religion, Family Life/Faith Formation, and Catholicity/Communication is an effort to focus sufficient time on those issues which are of real priority at this moment in the history of Catholic Education. As well the inclusion of strategic planning in the terms of reference of the policy review committee will provide opportunity for the Board of Trustees to take greater ownership in the development of the 2019-2022 Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

2019-2022 HWCDSB MULTI-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The approval of a Multi-Year Strategic Plan is one of the important responsibilities of a locally elected school board. For me, effective strategic planning is a journey with three important phases: development, implementation and monitoring.

In a recently released research project on education reform conducted by the Carnegie Corporation, one of the authors wrote:

“Instead of assuming everyone is on the same page, deliberate attempts must be made to forge a shared understanding about what students need most from their time in our education system.”

At the wise recommendation of Director Hansen, the previous Board established an appropriated surplus to ensure sufficient funds/resources are available to support a welcoming, thorough and effective consultation process. Real consultation during the development stage necessitates deliberate outreach to all partners. Town hall meetings, student/staff/parent and parish voice forums as well as digital forums should all be considered. Particularly in light of rapid and complex societal changes, the development stage requires a commitment to authentically listen and every effort to resist the danger of assuming or taking for granted.

The implementation stage of MYSP requires regular and well-planned communication with the goal of realizing system-wide shared ownership. Even the most well-written plan serves little purpose if it is not well understood and embraced by those most directly entrusted to implement it.

When President John F. Kennedy asked a custodian at NASA what his job was, he responded, *“It was to help land a man on the moon.”* For me, effective strategic planning is defined by similar understanding, commitment and shared ownership. Success can be determined by the degree to which all who serve in (or support) our system see it as a valuable guide/tool to assist them in “enabling all students to realize their fullness of humanity of which Jesus Christ is the model.”

The final stage in effective multi-year strategic planning is regular monitoring and the communication of results. Under the leadership of Director of Education Hansen and Associate Director Pace-Gubekjian, the manner in which monitoring reports on student well-being and stewardship of resources are written and presented has improved significantly. Building upon that good work, we need to continue to refine reports, paying particular attention to the inclusion of clear and measurable results.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION’S 2019/2020 FUNDING ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

The recently released Ministry of Education’s 2019/2020 Funding Engagement Guide heralds if not a new beginning, a new or different approach to the manner in which school boards are funded. Throughout the history of our Board/system, often out of necessity and always out of a commitment to good stewardship, we (our predecessors) have worked tirelessly to assure the most effective and efficient use of available resources.

Through what for many is new language, the Government invites school boards to define core and non-core areas as well as identify efficiencies. We were urged in this past Sunday’s Gospel to be vigilant and alert. I suggest that we as the elected advocates for publicly funded

Catholic Education are called at this moment to do just that (vigilant/alert). While showing a willingness to be creative and open to change, we must be absolute in our commitment to protect those programs/services that are core to the mission of Catholic Education. It is as well an opportunity to review programs and services to students, particularly those that the Board has discretion in providing.

While not without challenge, the Funding Engagement consultation is as well an opportunity to promote the truth that an effective education funding model is built on the four essential principles/pillars of ADEQUACY, ACCOUNTABILITY, EQUITY and FLEXIBILITY / AUTONOMY. Particularly in a period of restrained if not reduced revenue, it is crucial the level of equity and local autonomy lost in recent years be restored and increased.

Seeing this evening/meeting as one of a new beginning, I would like to propose four areas of priority. I do so not to suggest they are an all-inclusive list but rather in light of current realities they require particular attention.

(i) Catholic Identity

More than ever, it is vital for publicly funded Catholic schools to live and promote a distinct Catholic Christian identity.

Excellence

Excellence is one of the pillars upon which Catholic Education has been built. Historical and recent system, provincial and national assessments give witness to our Board's and staff's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

Excellence or fullness of humanity is of course the promise made to all students. Saying that, as a result of a number of factors beyond their control, the realization of our mission (excellence) requires additional resources for some students and schools.

In light of the likelihood of restraint in funding, it will be particularly important for us to continue to support existing and explore new strategies which realize equity in opportunity for all students.

I would include among these programs/initiatives: Wilma's Place, St. Martin's Manor, Notre Dame House, PASS/SOAR, St. Charles Continuing Education programs (to name only some). Beyond support for these programs, additional focus (resources) must be provided to those students not achieving the provincial standard.

Among those programs that speak in a particular way to the identity of Catholic Education in Hamilton-Wentworth are our Special Education philosophy of "Each Belongs" and our support for socio-economic disadvantaged students through the "Equal Opportunities Initiative."

In 2019 we will proudly celebrate the 50th Anniversary of "Each Belongs." It is one of the distinguishing features of our system and is of benefit to all of our students. From the early pioneers (visionaries) to our dedicated staff today, "Each Belongs" flows from our vision of every child being created in the unique image of our loving God.

While not compromising our commitment to “Each Belongs,” the increasingly complex needs of students, overspending in Special Education and restrained funding necessitates a full review of the strategies and resources necessary to realize the vision of this philosophy.

Our Board’s unwavering commitment to the preferential option for the poor is most visible through our Equal Opportunities Initiative. We have seen impressive results from the students in our Equal Opportunity schools. It will continue to be important to provide equitable distribution of resources and where necessary make wise use of appropriated surplus to support/enhance this fundamental part of who we are as a Catholic school system (equity – more for some).

Religious Education/Faith Formation

In his book “Charism and Culture,” author Timothy J. Cooke writes:

“An authentic Catholic school seeks to transform persons and society by bringing the Gospel message to every situation and by facilitating an ever-deepening relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

This ultimate purpose (identity) is realized most directly through the Christian witness of teachers and other support staff, and in partnership with parents and parishes. It as well requires the permeation of Catholic virtues in all areas of the curriculum.

This challenges us to provide the necessary funds to continue to purchase (each grade) the “Growing in Faith/Growing in Christ” Religious elementary education resource as well as the

necessary support to successfully introduce the new secondary Religious Education curriculum. Equally important will be the provision of increased opportunities for teachers to explore and inculcate in them the richness of these wonderful resources.

Christian Service education is another distinguishing feature (identity) of Catholic Education. Through the goodness of our staff, a number of our students participate in life-changing experiences such as D.R.E.A.M.S., Haiti, Notre Dame Vision, De Mazenod Door and our system-wide “Walk with Christ” Pilgrimage. It will be important for us to continue to explore/support initiatives, which expand opportunity for more students to participate.

I remain convinced that greater attention/priority needs to be placed on the effectiveness of programming (and time spent) with regard to students reflecting on the “why” of Christian Service.

Central to Catholic Education identity is the promotion of communal and personal prayer. Father Henri Nouwen wrote:

“Prayer is to let God’s word speak deep within and tell you, you are my beloved.”

What an important message for young people to hear and see in their teachers and other staff.

We have seen in the great example and goodness of Sr. Ann Marshall, Leanne Thompson, Andy Burns and Paul Beaudette (staff throughout our system) how prayer in the form of Christian Meditation can change a young person’s life and strengthen the culture of a Catholic school community.

Each of these areas are of such value they require regular monitoring so as to ensure they are being sufficiently resourced and effectively provided. In this regard, I recommend our newly formed Religion, Family Life and Faith Formation Committee conduct a review of our “Living with Faith” document so as to ensure in light of current realities we are providing the necessary resources and most effective strategies to support these fundamental programs.

Another area which speaks to the identity of Catholic Education is the wide range and quality of co-curricular programs in our elementary and secondary schools. As a result of the tremendous service of our teachers, other staff and parent volunteers, we have co-curricular programs second to none in the province. Whether in athletics, arts, robotics, FFL, Culture of Life, Stewardship of Creation, student leadership (and many others), our students participate in co-curricular programs of the highest quality. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank all of our teachers, principals/vice-principals and other staff who make these enjoyable and valuable experiences possible for so many of our students.

(ii) Good Stewardship

We can take great pride in the strong financial foundation we have built over the last number of years. We as well (system) can be proud of the many improvements made to our school facilities and properties. This past year we celebrated the opening of the new Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Elementary School and the addition and major renovation at St. Jean de Brébeuf Catholic Secondary School. We as well marked the completion of our two final

state-of-the-art artificial turf playing fields at St. Mary's and Cathedral High Schools.

We look forward to the awarding of a contract for the new Binbrook Catholic Elementary School and the design and tendering of the new St. Patrick Catholic Elementary School.

All of this would not have been possible without the sound decision making of our predecessors and the wise counsel of our senior administrative staff. I would like to particularly recognize the vision and tireless work of our Associate Director of Corporate Services Paola Pace-Gubekjian. It is no coincidence that this strengthening of our financial situation and improvements to many of our school facilities has occurred during her eight years of leadership in our Corporate Services Department.

These significant achievements did not happen without good planning and at times difficult decision making. It is clear that a similar level of planning and prudent decision making will be required over the next number of years. One area of priority I suggest is the urgent need to review and realign our secondary school boundaries. While building locations and areas of enrolment pressure have changed over the last number of years, our boundaries have for the most part remained static. In order to make the most efficient use of secondary facilities, I suggest imagining a system with no boundaries and in light of the location of our buildings, determine where they should now be. I strongly recommend that the senior administration commence an immediate review of secondary school boundaries and through the Policy Review/Strategic Planning Committee, bring a report to our Board by the end of the current school year.

Another area of priority in the near future will be the consideration of how, when and where to expand French Immersion locations.

(iii) Well-Being of Staff

Through the good work of our system and school staff, we have introduced a number of programs in support of student well-being, with particular attention to mental health. I suggest similar priority must be placed on the well-being of staff. In affirmation and support of the amazing work of Respectful Workplace Coordinator Meg Petkoff, Adult Faith Animator Emeritus Jerry Creedon and Pastoral Care/EAP Coordinator Kelly Lazure-Valconi, there is a real need to explore strategies and provide additional resources in support of a collective effort to promote the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of staff.

Beyond our responsibility to do so, a holistic vision of the well-being of staff is necessary to realize the fruits of “Renewing the Promise of Catholic Education.” Among other things, there is a need to:

- Re-structure Administration so as to align support for wellness, Faith Formation and Professional Development.
- Together with Employee Groups, review current strategies and recommend appropriate additional programs (pro-active).
- Review current practices/structures so as to mitigate against centralization and promote subsidiarity/local decision making.

- Encourage dialogue with regard to internal and external factors that inhibit well-being.
- Most of all, listen/survey staff so as to better understand needs.
- Accompany those staff members who for whatever reasons are hurting.

Catholic Christian Community

Central to the realization of our mission is the nurturing of truly Catholic Christian communities in each of our schools and administrative centres. Priority must continue to be placed on the provision of resources/supports which encourage local efforts to nurture and strengthen the building of community.

We are truly blessed by those who form the Catholic Education community in Hamilton-Wentworth.

Bishops

It is most appropriate that this moment of New Beginning / Inaugural Board Meeting take place in a school named in honour of one of the giants in the history of Catholic Education, Bishop Joseph Francis Ryan. Like Bishop Ryan and his other predecessors, Bishop Crosby inspires those who serve Catholic Education throughout our Diocese.

Despite his very busy schedule and many important responsibilities, he is present at numerous school and system events. Please know Bishop Crosby that we deeply appreciate your constant support and benefit a great deal from your tremendous example.

Parishes

Pastors and others who serve in the parishes throughout our system are crucially important partners in Catholic Education. We are grateful to them for all they do to minister to the spiritual well-being of our students and staff.

Parents and Catholic School Councils

The Provincial Government's consultation with regard to a proposed "Parent Bill of Rights" is a wonderful opportunity for us to promote our Catholic vision of parents as the primary educators of their children. As stated by Saint John Paul II, "the role of parents, particularly with regard to family life education, is irreplaceable."

We are committed to exploring partnerships/strategies with Catholic School Councils which promote faith formation opportunities for parents. We thank the members of Catholic School Councils and the Board's Parent Involvement Committee for their important service.

Employee Groups

I want to assure all of our Board Employee Groups and those who lead them of our commitment to work in a spirit of co-operation and harmony. Particularly in a period of funding restraint and other external challenges, respectful and open dialogue is essential.

A recent meeting with Employee Group Presidents and an earlier one of the Pastoral Care Advisory Committee are cause for real hope with consensus on shared responsibility with regard to staff well-being.

Student Leaders

I have been inspired by the goodness and strong leadership of the Student Council Presidents of our schools. Together with Student Trustee Malcew they provide an effective voice for students across our system. The unrivaled results in OCSTA's Together in Faith campaign and willingness to actively support our "Toonies for Tuition" fundraising effort are but two examples of their commitment to the greater good of Catholic Education.

Despite the challenges which are almost certain to come, I am filled with much joy as we begin our four-year journey. I am so in large measure as a result of the outstanding men and women who serve in our schools and administrative centres.

In their Pastoral Letter "Renewing the Promise," our Bishops write:

*"As partners in Catholic Education it is not about the great things we do;
it is about doing little things with great love. This is the heart
of joyful discipleship; it is the foundation of Catholic Education."*

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express appreciation to staff throughout our school system who do both the great and little things with much love.

- Teachers, Chaplaincy Leaders, Custodians, Assistant Custodians, Maintenance Staff, Educational Assistants, Clerical Staff, Early Childhood Educators, Professional Staff (Speech Pathologists, Social Workers, Mental Health and Indigenous Education Leads) and school support staff for their outstanding service.

- I want to recognize those who provide such important service in our administrative positions – Planning, Payroll, Purchasing, Accounts, Finance, Community Use of Schools, Human Resources, Information Technology and Plant, etc. Please know that we appreciate that your work is much more than “back office” and crucially important to the realization of our mission.
- To those who minister to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of our staff, we express our admiration and deep gratitude: Respectful Workplace Coordinator Meg Petkoff, Pastoral Care/EAP Coordinator Kelly Lazure-Valconi and Adult Faith Animator Emeritus Jerry Creedon.
- Principals, Vice-Principals, Senior Managers and Managers. We appreciate that the complexity and number of responsibilities entrusted to you have increased significantly in recent years. We thank you for your willingness to respond to the call of Catholic Education leadership with such generosity.
- Assistant Superintendents: Julie Angiolillo, Gregory Tabone and Sandra Scime.
- Superintendents of Education: Corrado Ciapanna, Ivana Fortino, Toni Kovach, Morris Hucal and Sandie Pizzuti.
- Controller of Corporate Services Nancy DeGiuli and Superintendent of Human Resources Angelo Romano have brought new vision and amazing work ethic to these important positions. Thank them for their tremendous service.
- Our school board, staff and students are blessed through the sacrifice, goodness and dedicated service of Associate Director of Corporate Services Paola Pace-Gubekjian. Her complete conviction to good stewardship and the realization of

our mission is a wonderful example to all who have the privilege of journeying with her.

- The Christian witness and faith-filled leadership of our Director of Education David Hansen makes a significant positive difference to our Board and school system. His vision and obvious goodness inspires staff, students and trustees. I know we will benefit a great deal from your leadership throughout this term.

On behalf of the Board and personally, I would like to thank those who assist and support us in the Director's Office: Emilia Rastelli, Sandra Giacinti and Stephanie Santi.

I would like to express my personal deep appreciation to those who have been of such invaluable support to me:

- To my fellow Trustees for your trust and friendship. It is indeed an honour for me to serve with you.
- Marnie Jadon for her wise counsel on so many occasions and her many kindnesses and constant efforts to build community.
- Jerry Creedon for his spiritual example and for being Jerry.
- Lorena Madalena for her generosity of self and invaluable assistance. Even while completing the additional responsibilities required of her as a result of her well-deserved promotion, she has continued to provide tremendous support to me, our Board and the work of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees (OCSTA) and Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association (CCSTA). Can't thank her enough.

- I want to thank my four wonderful children, Michael, Kyle, Colleen and Monica, and daughter-in-law Robyn. Each in their own way has been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me. I couldn't be more proud of them or grateful for them.
- Most especially and completely inadequately, I would like to thank Carol (knowing sometimes thank you is not enough). Her love, unfailing support and commitment to faith and family mean everything to me. (It has been a wonderful journey with each day feeling like a new beginning).

I close praying that our decisions this year and over the next four contribute to each and every young person/student, and that they grow to know in the words of St. Catherine of Siena that:

“God is in love with you as if you were the only one in the world.”

Thank you and God bless publicly funded Catholic education.