

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board

INITIAL ADDRESS

By

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CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

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Tuesday, December 3, 2019

“To Christians the future does have a name. And its name is HOPE. Feeling hopeful does not mean to be optimistically naïve. Hope is the virtue of heart that doesn’t lock itself into darkness, that doesn’t dwell in the past, does not simply get by in the present but is able to see tomorrow.”

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

In this year in which Catholic schools in our community and throughout Ontario give thanks to God and celebrate their rich history of service as “Ignitors of Hope”, the words of his Holiness, Pope Francis are for me cause for encouragement, challenge and renewal. Our school system’s hope filled/Christ centred mission/purpose can be summarized in our Board’s motto of, *“Believing, Achieving and Serving”*. As you know, these words have been approved as the pillars of our Multi-year Strategic Plan and will continue to guide the deliberations of our Board and work of our schools.

Like Pope Francis, Bishop Robert Barron reminds us as to how we as Catholic Christians are called to look to the future (how to plan). He writes:

*“The famous call of Vatican II is to **Read the Signs of the times**. Followers of Jesus are meant to look at the world with clear eyes, to see what is happening, to be attentive. But this attention is of a particular type. It is not the attention of the scientist or the philosopher or the politician – though it can include those. It is our attention to the things of God.”*

Giving thanks for the past and in deep appreciation to those who continue to provide outstanding faith-filled service to the cause of publicly funded Catholic education, I believe at this time there is a real/urgent need to prayerfully discern/read the signs of the times. To be attentive requires both a willingness to listen and to pay attention to the other. This I suggest challenges those entrusted to leadership in Catholic education to invite and genuinely listen to the voices of students, teachers, other staff, parents and pastors. At the system and school level, it is their hopes, their dreams and the will of God that should shape our future.

My favourite description of life/change was provided by St. John Henry Newman when he wrote:

“To be fully alive is to have changed often.”

While protecting those core characteristics that have shaped our distinct Catholic identity, now is for me in the spirit of St. John Henry Newman a time of hope and renewal. Our on-going Multi-year Strategic Plan process and other initiatives, which I will speak to, are opportunities for growth and hold the promise of protecting and promoting the enduring gift of publicly funded Catholic education.

It is with this focus on renewal and hope that I will comment on:

- Believing (Catholic identity)
- Achieving (excellence)
- Serving (good stewardship)

In their book, the “*Governance Core*”, authors Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan write: “*Governance is often misunderstood and underappreciated. Governance derives from the Greek word Kubernesis, “to steer a ship”. Simply put governance is steering: management is rowing.*”

I quote that first to express words of appreciation to the outstanding individuals who serve on this Board of Trustees. I am filled with hope each time I witness the individual and collective goodness and commitment of the men and women I am honoured to serve with. I quote it as well to state my absolute belief in the significant contribution locally elected trustees provide to the cause of publicly funded Catholic education and the important role “we” have in “steering” the change/renewal that the future promises.

Last year you may recall I cited the development of our school system’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan as one of the important responsibilities of a School Board. My belief in the importance of this process has only been increased as a result of the many thousands of responses we have received from our invitation to provide input. I want to recognize and thank Director of Education, Dave Hansen for his tremendous leadership and work with regard to phase 1 (consultation) of our Multi-Year Strategic planning process.

It is now incumbent upon us to use the input received (and our sessions as a Board of Trustees) to develop a clear, well-communicated plan that invites shared ownership and accountability.

Campbell and Fullan state the next phase of our MYSP journey well for me when they write:

“Successful School Systems must have a shared moral imperative – a relentless commitment to the learning of all students. No exceptions must drive the board and its individual and collective action.” And, *“we say if there is not a clear moral imperative, if there is not a specific means of implementing it in practice, and if there is not measurable outcomes that mark progress and attainment and if the board and the superintendent cannot articulate the state of play about the moral imperative as a system in action, then it does not exist in reality.”*

“The moral purpose is geared to real concrete educational goals for children.”

From our Catholic vision that moral purpose is centred on our mission (the person of Jesus Christ) and the “real concrete educational goals for children” should be clearly visible (and measurable) in the pillars of, *“Believing, Achieving and Serving”*.

As I reflected on each of these pillars and looked with hope on our call/responsibility to lead in a time of renewal, I was reminded of the words of Frederick Buechner when he wrote:

“In His holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints.”

I say that to give thanks to God for the many good and holy men and women who have and continue to faithfully serve Catholic education in our community. I name some of these

individuals but in doing so know there are countless others in our schools, administrative centres, parishes and homes.

Believing (Catholic Identity)

We have branded our Board's purpose in the words "*Believing, Achieving and Serving*". It is the first of these, believing, which gives life to the achieving and serving. Our faith is what makes us look to the future with hope.

Our believing pillar should affirm those programs, resources and services that promote our distinct Catholic identity. Being particularly attentive to the "signs of the times", the final two stages of our MYSP process are for me a real opportunity to identify new and/or revised initiatives as well as target budget drivers in support of these programs. All of this in our effort to build upon and renew our wonderful system.

I would like to suggest/recommend as well that a thorough review of our "*Learning with Faith*" document is a real opportunity for renewal. This document has served our system very well. It has been, at their request, shared with many Catholic School Boards in Ontario and beyond. A review of the five themes/areas of teaching, community prayer/worship, proclamation and Christian service would for me be a very positive process as it would invite; shared ownership and reflect current and future needs of students and staff. Twenty-two years ago, the document invited, "*all partners in Catholic Education to recognize who they are called to be and what they are called to do*". I suggest similar discernment today is called for and would help to facilitate renewal.

In his (gift to youth, our church and world) Apostolic Exhortation, “*Christ is Alive*”, His Holiness, Pope Francis writes:

“Schools are unquestionably a platform for drawing young people close to God.” And later,
“Catholic schools remain essential places for the evangelization of the young.”

He as well invites those involved in Catholic education to a process of “self-criticism” and cautions against the “fear of change” or “entrenchment”. He speaks to six areas:
I raise them as they; affirm the wonderful things happening in our schools speak to our Catholic identity and echo a number of the recommendations/thoughts I have heard from student leaders.

- i. He indicates that, *“Many young people have come to appreciate silence and closeness to God and that we should never underestimate the ability of young people to be open to contemplative prayer. We need only find the right ways and means to help them in this precious experience.”*

We have seen over the last number of years how the goodness and vision of Sister Ann Marshall has shaped a renewal in the manner in which our students and staff come to experience the peace and joy of Jesus. Others like Leanne Thompson, Paul Beaudette, Andy Burns and many teachers and other staff continue to share the “ways and means” through the gift of Christian meditation/contemplative prayer. (Continue to support and expand).

- ii. With regard to worship and prayer he writes:

“In many settings, young Catholics are asking for prayer opportunities and sacramental celebrations capable of speaking to their daily lives through a fresh, authentic and joyful liturgy.”

We give thanks to our secondary school Chaplaincy Leaders and staff throughout our system who plan and organize occasions of worship and prayer. We as well encourage conversation (listening to) with students so as to ensure retreats/liturgies are speaking to the presence of Christ in their daily lives.

- iii. We know that a hallmark of Catholic education and our school system in particular is a commitment to authentic Christian service. In support of this, Pope Francis writes:

“Christian service represents a unique opportunity for growth and openness to God’s gift of faith and charity. Many young people are attracted by the possibility of helping others especially children and the poor. Often this is the first step to a discovery or rediscovery of life in Christ and the church.”

We know that our students benefit from a number of Christian service experiences including DREAMS, the DeMazenod Door, Toonies for Tuition, Walk with Christ Pilgrimage, Notre Dame Vision and many others.

In the support of the difference Christian services makes in the life of a young person, I suggest a review/renewal of:

- a) The manner in which we integrate reflection/discernment into our Christian service programs; and
- b) Ensure that the experiences students participate in and the charities supported by schools and our Board promote our distinct identity. In this way the “why” of Christian service will be more obvious/real for students.

iv. In an area of great pride for our school system, Pope Francis writes:

“Nor can we overlook the importance of the arts, like theatre, painting, and others. Music is particularly important. The language of music also represents bearing on literature and its renewal.”

v. Equally important Pope Francis writes:

“Is the emphasis that young people place on sports, the church should not underestimate the potential of sports for education and formation but instead maintain a strong presence there. At the heart of the experience of sport is “joy”. The joy of exercising, of being together, of being alive and rejoicing in the gifts the creator gives us each day.”

vi. Finally he writes:

“Nature holds a special attention for many adolescents and young people who recognize our need to care for the environment.....In the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, these experiences can be a real initiation to the school of universal fraternity and contemplative prayer.”

I would add as well they instill within our students a commitment to being good stewards of God's creation.

All of these in school and co-curricular activities (plus countless others) like; Culture of Life, Robotics, Student Leadership, Anti-Bullying and Inclusion Clubs (etc.) would not be possible without the dedicated service of teacher (other staff and volunteer) coaches and advisors. The co-curricular programs provided by our school system are second to none in the Province and on behalf of the Board I want to thank all of the Principals/Vice-Principals, teachers, coaches/advisors (and other staff) who make these enjoyable and important learning experiences possible for so many of our students.

I would as well like to thank the central administrative staff who provide important support for these valuable programs.

In the spirit of renewal and openness to change, I strongly recommend that each of these areas:

- i. Continue to receive the necessary financial and human resources to strengthen and grow this wide range of programming.
- ii. Similar to our Catholic Coaching Program and the provision of Christian Mediation retreats, that the above areas be reviewed and renewed through the lens of the current and future needs of students (and the degree to which they promote our Catholic identity).

Faith Formation/Well-Being of Staff

“The more completely an educator (staff) can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person [Jesus Christ] that is being presented to the students, the more this ideal will be believed and imitated.”

The words of St. Pope Paul VI speak to a central truth about Catholic education and for me challenge our Board (all Catholic boards) to give priority to the faith formation and well-being of staff.

The realization of our mission (spiritual, physical, emotional and mental well-being of students) and the renewal required to meet the opportunities/challenges the future holds cannot be achieved without significant and on-going attention to this crucial area.

The goodness and exemplary professionalism of the Board’s Pastoral Care/EAP Co-ordinator, Kelly Lazure-Valconi, Respectful Workplace Co-ordinator Laura Muraca and Meg Petkoff and Adult Faith Animator, Jerry Creedon are cause for real hope. The outstanding service they provide to staff and students is immeasurable.

In support of their work/efforts and in light of its pivotal importance, I strongly recommend that programs in support of staff well-being and adult faith formation be:

- Prominently identified in our 2019-2020 Multi-Year Strategic Plan; and

- Sufficiently resourced and clearly identified as a 2020/2021 (and on going) budget driver.

I reiterate two of the three recommendations I made last year out of an effort to continue to advance this priority:

- Restructure Senior Administration so as to align support for staff wellness, faith formation and professional development; and
- Review current practices/structures so as to mitigate against centralization and promote subsidiary/local decision making.

Concrete progress has been made with regard to the third recommendation I made that being in collaboration with Employee Group Leaders to review current strategies and suggest additional programs. As a result of the commitment of our Employee Group Presidents, a number of meetings have taken place and open and positive discussion has occurred. A number of recommendations have been made including; mental health training for the executives of all employee groups, inclusion of resources with focus on well-being at the Father Kennedy Library and a review of language in attendance support letters.

Particularly with regard to adult faith formation, I want to be clear my vision of renewal is one of support. In light of changes in our society and demographics, I remain convinced this is an area of urgent, consistent and strong support.

The form of adult faith formation I envision was brilliantly outlined in a homily given by His Eminence Cardinal Gerald Lacroix (Archbishop of Quebec city) on the Feast of Christ the King.

Using the life of St. Francois de Laval as the model, he described the missionary zeal required in our world (church and schools) as having the following three characteristics:

- i. A passionate love for Jesus Christ;
- ii. An urgent need from within to announce the Gospel to all peoples; and
- iii. An awareness of the precious nature of who we are.

In my read of the signs of times, this well describes what is needed and what is being asked of teachers and others involved in Catholic education. To ask it of them without sufficient encouragement and support is in my view unfair.

I remain convinced that as stated in the book, *“Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools”* (Timothy J. Cooke) that:

“Relationships have the potential to be a defining charism for 21st Century Catholic Schools.”

Meetings with Employee Group Presidents have been a real source of hope for me and given witness to the value of authentic listening. They have reinforced my belief that renewal and progress with regard to faith formation and well-being cannot be sustained without an attentiveness to the voices and needs of staff. It is for this reason that I include recognition of those that contribute to the strengthening of relationships and building of community under the Believing pillar.

Bishop Crosby

We are truly blessed to have Bishop Crosby as the spiritual leader of our school system and Diocese. His faith filled leadership and constant support are real “Ignitors of Hope” for all in our Catholic school system. His generous (through the Bishop Ryan Foundation) contribution to a number of our schools speaks to the value he places on areas (equal opportunities, the arts and partnerships) that promote the distinct identity of Catholic education.

We thank him for his presence at so many events and for serving as a source of renewal and light.

Parishes

Pastors and parish communities are essential partners. We are indebted to those who minister to the sacramental and spiritual life of our school communities.

Catholic School Councils (Parents)

One of the areas supported in recent grants provided by the Bishop Ryan Foundation are initiatives that support/strengthen the parish/school partnership. It is hoped that projects that promote parent/adult faith formation will come forward and serve as a source of renewal in parish/school relationships. They will as well underscore our commitment to parents as the primary educators of their children.

We thank Catholic School Councils and the members of our Catholic Parent Involvement Committee for the significant contribution they make to our system. We as well commit to

listening/paying attention to their important input with regard to the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and review of our Secondary School Admission Policies.

Employee Groups

I commented earlier on the importance of relationships and the value of meetings/discussions with Employee Group Presidents. Particularly as bargaining continues at the Provincial level and will later at the local level, I want to assure all staff (their representatives) of our commitment to work with them in a spirit of harmony and co-operation.

Student Leaders

Through the enthusiasm and goodness of our Student Council Presidents, our school system contributed more than any other Catholic School District in Canada to the *Toonies for Tuition* campaign. Student Trustee Troisi and this year's student leaders have provided their own vision and introduced new strategies to support our collective goal of surpassing last year's amount.

As stated earlier, I believe listening to (being attentive) the voices of students (young people) is essential in Renewing the Promise of Catholic Education (value cannot be overstated).

Achieving (Excellence)

Academic Excellence is one of the pillars upon which Catholic education has been built. During the remaining stages of the development of our Multi-Year Strategic Plan, it is essential that our "relentless commitment to the learning of all students" be crystal clear and that the strategies in support of excellence include "measurable outcomes that make progress".

Our vision of excellence (and Catholic education) is guided in part by our commitment to students who are impacted by socio-economic, special needs or other factors beyond their control.

Our Equal Opportunities Project and philosophy of “Each Belongs” have served as sources of hope for many students and helped to distinguish who and what we are as a Catholic school system.

Projects such as Wilma’s Place, St. Martin’s Manor, PASS/SOAR, Notre Dame House, St. Charles Continuing Education Programs (and many others) give witness to our commitment to excellence for all and an openness to change.

Renewal of our Catholic School System must give priority to and include (new) strategies and sufficient resources that support socio-economically disadvantaged schools and students (all) that benefit from our Philosophy of Each Belongs.

Two such opportunities to strengthen/renew these areas are:

- i. Objective consideration of the soon to be presented report on our Special Education programming flowing from funds received through the “Audit and Accountability Fund”; and
- ii. A review of data and criteria that contributes to the identification of schools included in our Equal Opportunities Initiative.

I suggest the vision and openness to change that made “Each Belongs” the “Equal Opportunities Project” possible are necessary at this time to ensure the renewal and sustainability of these crucially important areas. It is through this lens that I hope we will consider the recommendations that come forward in these reports.

Our commitment to reviewing and strengthening our Safe School Policies and practices will be important throughout a time of hope/renewal.

Serving (Good Stewardship)

A strong financial foundation and a commitment to effective and efficient use of available resources are very important to ensure the promise of positive change and renewal.

As a Board of Trustees and as a school system, we can take great pride in the results of our commitment to good stewardship. Examples of these benefits for schools and students include:

- Appropriated surplus in support of important priorities such as equal opportunities, faith formation (retreats) and risk management;
- Construction of the new Binbrook Catholic Elementary School and on-going planning of the new St. Patrick’s Catholic Elementary School and Child Care Centres at St. Augustine’s Catholic Elementary and St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Elementary Schools;
- Unprecedented infusion of funds to support the renewal of school facilities;
- Additional funding in support of technology; and

- Sustained funding for the purchase of new Elementary Religious Education Resources.

Many people have contributed to the commitment to good stewardship that exists throughout our school system. Saying that, the leadership, wise counsel and tireless work of Associate Director of Corporate Services, Paola Pace-Gubekjian has been (and is) instrumental to the improvements we have made to our facilities and our ability to provide sustained/additional resources in a number of important areas.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize (as one example only) Mrs. Pace-Gubekjian's efforts with regard to our receipt of and use of "Audit and Accountability Funding". It was no surprise to me that only three (of 72 school boards) were approved for funding. I say that knowing the application process and follow-up necessitated an enormous amount of work for those in Mrs. Pace-Gubekjian's position. As a result of her commitment to the good of our school system and openness to change the additional work and responsibilities associated with the fund, did not deter her. It is this form of witness and commitment that leads to renewal.

As you know, good stewardship requires constant attention. Our consideration of the input received through our consultation on Secondary School Admission Policies is one such area. Whether through revisions to these policies, a change in school boundaries or a combination of both, better balancing our secondary school enrollments is essential. I recommend this be given priority by our Board in the early months of 2020. It demands for me an openness to responsible change and is necessary to realize on-going renewal.

Another area of priority and openness to change are strategies to sustain the high level of transportation we currently provide. An openness to change with regard to the findings of the Bell Time Study will be important.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express deep appreciation to staff throughout our school system who make the hope for renewal possible.

- Teachers, Chaplaincy Leaders, Custodians, Assistant Custodians, Maintenance, Educational Assistants, Clerical, Early Childhood Educators, Professional staff (Speech Pathologists, Social Workers, Mental health and Indigenous Education Leads and all school support staff for their dedicated 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.
- Principals, Vice-Principals, Senior Managers and Managers for their crucially important leadership. An era of renewal and change cannot occur without strong school and system leadership.

- Kelly Lazure-Valconi, Meg Petkoff, Laura Muraca and Jerry Creedon who minister so generously to our staff.
- 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 Business Services, Nancy DeGiuli and Superintendent of Human Resources, Angelo Romano. They are shining stars in terms of integrating faith-filled leadership and strong business/human resource practices.
- As indicated earlier, our Board, staff and most especially students are blessed as a result of the faith filled service of Associate Director of Corporate Services, Paola Pace-Gubekjian.
- I want to recognize and thank Director of Education, David Hansen for his obvious Christian witness and faith filled leadership. The vision and service of the Director of Education is crucial to realizing renewal and hope within the context of Catholic Education. We are indeed blessed to have Mr. Hansen as the administrative leader of our school system. (Thank him as well for trust and positive working relationship).

- On behalf of the Board and personally I would like to thank Emilia Rastelli and Sandra Giacinti for the important assistance they provide in the Director's Office.
- I would like to express my deep personal gratitude to those who are of such inspiration and invaluable support to me.
- To my fellow Trustees for your confidence, trust and friendship. It is an honour for me to serve with you.
- Director of Communications, Marnie Jadon for her wise counsel and assistance on so many occasions. (A role model in terms of the vision of communication and goodness).
- Jerry Creedon and Kelly Lazure-Valconi for their outstanding Christian witness (for serving as real sources of hope).
- I cannot thank Lorena Madalena enough for her exemplary work and invaluable support and assistance. Often with very short notice or under tight timelines, she always completes tasks professionally and with a generous heart. Beyond our Board/school system, Lorena also makes a significant contribution to the work of the O.C.S.T.A and C.C.S.T.A.
- I want to thank my four wonderful children, Michael, Kyle, Colleen and Monica and daughter-in-law Robyn. I love each of them equally and am so proud how each has shaped their own path. Saying that in their presence, I want to tell Kyle and Monica how

proud I am of the way they have integrated their faith and work. (responding to God's call)

- Most especially and as I have stated on previous occasions I know completely inadequately, I would like to thank Carol. Some of you will know that I am a big country music fan. In one of the songs I like, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill sing, "*Better then I was, more than I am*". These words describe what Carol is for me. Can never thank her enough for her constant support, friendship, love and the hope she constantly provides.

I began quoting Pope Francis when he wisely wrote:

"To Christians the future does have a name – and its name is hope."

I want to conclude by saying in the context of our lives and the precious gift of publicly funded Catholic Education, hope has a name and it is Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that our deliberations and discussions over the next year contribute to the renewal of our school system so as all of our students come to know and experience the real hope found in relationship with Jesus and in the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict they will come to realize and appreciate that:

"Each of us (them) is the result of a thought of God. Each of us (them) is willed. Each of us (them) is loved. Each of us (them) is necessary."

Thank you and God Bless Catholic education.