

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By

**PATRICK J. DALY
CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD**

**Inaugural Meeting of the Board
Tuesday, November 15, 2022
St. Mary Catholic Secondary School**

**“God loves you!”
“Jesus Saves you!” and
“The Holy Spirit lives in you!”**

Your Excellency Bishop Lobsinger, Special Guests, fellow Trustees, Mr. Hansen, Student Trustees, family members, ladies and gentlemen. I begin with words from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops recent *Pastoral Letter to Young People* as they serve for me as an encouraging reminder of the hope filled purpose of our Church and by extension, the mission of Catholic education. They are particularly appropriate as we come together at what is a time of change and new beginnings for the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board.

In a presentation I made recently to another Catholic board, I suggested that the **why** an individual chooses to seek the office of locally elected Catholic School Trustee is very important and encouraged each of them to reflect on the **why** in their own personal story/journey. In our 2010 booklet, *“The Call to Serve”*, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association indicated that:

*“Catholic School Trustees **share** in the joy of providing an education that addresses the spiritual, moral, academic and physical needs of our young people; and they contribute their skills, experiences and time as an investment in the future and in the future leadership our communities, Catholic schools, country and Church.”*

As it has been throughout the rich 170+ year history of Catholic education in our community, it is clear to me that the **why** for those around this table flows from a generous response to a call from God to govern and share in the joy that “addresses the spiritual, academic, moral and physical needs” of our students. Particularly throughout the last term when those entrusted with

the governance (and all throughout our Catholic school system) experienced numerous complex challenges, it was inspiring to witness the effective leadership and dedication of the trustees of this board. Such high levels of commitment and unity will serve us well as we navigate the opportunities and challenges the next four years hold.

I commend and congratulate each of the trustees that have been elected/acclaimed (called) to serve throughout the 2022-2026 term of office. In a special way, I would like to congratulate and welcome;

- Mrs. Josie Angelini (Wards 3 & 4)
- Ms. Ellen Agostino (Ward 6)

We look forward to hearing and benefitting from your new perspectives and to serve with you as we fulfill our four-fold role as advocates, stewards and political and servant leaders of publicly funded Catholic education.

In terms of the privilege to serve in leadership/governance in the context of publicly funded Catholic education (schools) I have become increasingly convinced of the need for; “active listening – prayer and right action”.

I would like to briefly walk through these one by one.

Active Listening

More than ever, it is important that those entrusted with leadership create conditions for **all** (particularly marginalized) voices to be heard. I say that to suggest that early in this term of

office, priority be placed on the monitoring and reviewing of existing structures for student, parent and staff engagement and where necessary create/establish new forums/strategies.

Such a review could include renewing/building on the success of current methods of listening (receiving input) including; policy review and budget consultation processes, Catholic student leadership forums, labour/management communication meetings, the Annual Parent Conference and the extremely valuable Rooted in Faith Staff Well-Being Committee. It should as well include an openness/willingness to establish new/additional strategies which serve to invite, encourage and support increased parent, parish, student and staff engagement/participation. Thoughtful consideration of the results of the recent “*SEE Me in Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board*” student and staff surveys will as well serve as an important opportunity to listen, learn and act.

The establishment of the school system’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan is a significant responsibility of Catholic school boards. As a result of the disruption that occurred throughout most of the last term of office, the previous Board of Trustees prudently decided to defer finalizing the 2019-2022 MYSP. The development, implementation and monitoring of a 2023-2026 MYSP now serves as a necessary and valuable opportunity to listen and establish goals and priorities.

Prayer

When describing the process, they use to plan for the year ahead, the authors of the Discerning Leadership Program write, “*that they gather in prayer so as like Jesus so often began **not** with His own plans but to discern God’s will.*” I say that to suggest the complexity of current and

future **challenges** and **opportunities** requires similar practice and openness to discerning God's will by those entrusted with leadership in Catholic schools and school boards. I do so as well to indicate that an evening for prayer and discernment for trustees and senior staff in December or early January is being planned and to recommend that similar gatherings take place throughout our term of office.

Right Action

Following my personal "reading of the signs of the times", prayer and discernment, I have become increasingly convinced that there is urgent need at the local and provincial level to engage in conversations and to act rightly so as to strengthen the Catholic Identity of publicly funded Catholic schools. My thoughts with regard to this important matter were sharpened recently when I read an article from a principal of a Catholic school in the United States when she wrote:

"If Catholic Identity is not front and centre, obvious in all that we do, we may be simply another good school in the area. Academic excellence is crucial, but without our Catholic Identity, we cease to have a defensible reason to exist."

The President of the Catholic University of America in his recent installation ceremony further assisted my clarity when he stated:

"Today I want to ask two very key big questions; number one; why do we exist? Number two; what is the purpose of our University (Catholic school system)?"

Similar to President Kilpatrick’s response with regard to why **we** exist, I would completely agree it is answered by faith in that, “*each person (student) is created by God to know, love and serve him and one another.*” With regard to purpose, Bishop Marcus Stock has for me best described the Catholic Identity of Catholic schools as, “*placing Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre*” of students’ learning experiences.

I do not comment on purpose or Identity to in any way diminish the good and amazing things happening in our schools each day but to acknowledge that the world students, staff, parents, parish communities and trustees live (and learn) in today is very different (highly complex) than in the past and we have a shared responsibility (serving with others) to “name and claim” our Catholic Identity. It is in the spirit of right action (and necessary) that I strongly recommend that ours is a time to encourage, support and celebrate openness to change, innovation, responsible risk taking and transformation. It is as well a time to do all we can to eliminate and discourage practices and structures that diminish subsidiarity and/or increase centralization/micro management.

While the journey of active listening and prayer should remain constant following discernment of God’s will, decisions to act rightly should not be delayed. Our annual process of establishing Budget Drivers is one such strategy that has served us well with regard to the effective allocation of resources in support of identified priorities. In this regard, I would like to recommend that our Board’s 2023/2024 Budget Driver be centred on Catholic Identity with sub drivers of; student learning recovery and faith formation, student and staff mental health and well-being, relationships/Catholic Christian community and good stewardship of resources.

Each of the sub-drivers for me flow from a reading of the “signs of the times” and are each linked to the over arching driver centred on Catholic Identity. Each one is as well closely connected to the need to continue to place priority on and provide sufficient resources in support of Adult Faith Formation and Catholic Leadership Development.

Learning Recovery / Student Faith Formation

It is clear that learning disruption and other issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted academic achievement. It is even more clear that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted some students and school communities more so than others. In ways harder to measure, it has as well likely impacted student faith formation and the acquisition of religious education knowledge.

I say this to suggest the need to;

- Strongly advocate to OCSTA and the Provincial Government of the need for increased and multi-year funding in support of learning recovery.
- Build upon the good work of the previous and current year in the provision of high-quality tutoring and other programs that contribute to student learning recovery.
- Adequately resource the 1-1 student device vision and other 21st century/innovation programs (including experiential learning apprenticeship training).
- Increased opportunity for student/class and school liturgies particularly the celebration of the “source and summit” of our faith the mass (prayer/Christian meditation).
- As followers of Christ, strengthen our commitment to our equal opportunities schools and any and all programs that realize equity in educational opportunity including; Wilma’s

Place, Notre Dame House, St. Martin's Manor, De Mazenod Door partnership and St. Charles Adult and Continuing Education programs to mention only a few.

- While continuing to place priority on a model of special education that supports our 60 year+ philosophy of “*Each Belongs*”, expand our vision and range of placement options that recognize the increasing complexity of student learning needs.
- The provision of adequate resources in support of Anti-Racism and Indigenous Education programs and actions that support our commitment to advancing Truth and Reconciliation.

- **Student and Staff Mental Health and Well-Being**

We know as well that both student and staff mental health and well-being has been impacted by the pandemic. I say this to strongly recommend the allocation of sufficient financial and human resources that support student and staff mental health and well-being. As I did last year, I do so as well to recognize the inspiring goodness of Kelly Lazure-Valconi and all in our Pastoral Care/Employee Assistance Program and to express deep gratitude to the members of the Rooted in Faith Staff Well-Being Committee (Sergio Cacoilo, Alison Coyle, Josh Mamer, Dave Finnerty, Andrea Farkas, Michael Lawlor, Marilyn Pavao, Charlie Troisi, Sharon Boase and Mark Straka) for their collaboration and shared commitment to the well-being of staff and the good of our Catholic school system.

Relationships / Catholic Christian Community

An African Proverb states, “*if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*”

I say this to express my conviction that the nurturing of Catholic Christian community at the

school and system level is central to the realization of our Christ centred mission and to restate my previously used quote that, “*relationships are a defining Charism for 21st century Catholic schools.*” (Belief that together is always better)

I do so as well to acknowledge and thank those we are privileged to **journey with together** in our shared commitment to Catholic education.

Bishop Crosby and Bishop Lobsinger

Throughout the history of Catholic education, the Diocese of Hamilton and our Catholic school system have been blessed by visionary and faith-filled Bishops. Like their predecessors, Bishops Crosby and Lobsinger recognize the significant contribution Catholic schools make to our Church and by word and action provide much appreciated support and encouragement.

Catholic School Councils / Catholic Parent Involvement Committee

Catholic School Councils and our Board’s Catholic Parent Involvement Committee provide valuable advice and play an important role in encouraging/promoting parental voice and engagement. More than ever, their efforts to place priority on co-ordinating events and initiatives that support parents in their irreplaceable role as the primary educators of their children is essential.

Parishes

I would like to express deep appreciation to the Pastors and Parish communities associated with the Catholic schools in our Board’s jurisdiction. I want to assure them not only of our gratitude

but as well of our commitment to work with them to renew and strengthen the crucial home-parish and school partnership.

Student Leaders

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to acknowledge and thank Student Trustees Paige Wallace and Alice Okpere and the Student Council Presidents (Executives) in each of our schools. Please know that your input and perspectives at the system and school level are valued and most especially know that the Christian witness you provide to your fellow students and each of us is crucially important and appreciated. Please do not underestimate the importance of your leadership and good example.

Employee Groups

I want to assure all of our Employee Group representatives of our absolute willingness to work with them in a spirit of co-operation and harmony. Particularly during a period of central and by extension local collective bargaining, I want to as well assure them of our commitment to fairness for students, staff and the good of our Catholic school system.

While it is not always possible to agree on every matter/issue, please know that we benefit from your (at times not so gentle) reminder of the value of active listening, right action and partnership.

Good Stewardship

As I have stated on a number of occasions, we can take pride in our commitment to good stewardship and the strong financial foundation we and previous Boards' of Trustees have built over the past number of years. Particularly throughout the pandemic, sound financial decision making and the prudent use of appropriated surplus has served our Catholic school system well.

During the upcoming year, we with much joy will open and bless the new St. Patrick and St. James Catholic Elementary Schools. We will as well open a new child care centre at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Elementary School and complete the design and commence construction of additions to Guardian Angels Catholic Elementary School and to Bishop Ryan Catholic Secondary School.

All of this as well as unprecedented purchases in student devices and learning resources would not have been possible without the vision, tireless work and sacrifice of our Associate Director of Corporate Services, Paola Pace-Gubekjian.

While wise decision making and effective planning has served our Board and system well, continued fiscal responsibility and good stewardship will be essential as we confront and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

As you know, the theme for Catholic Education Week this year is "We Are Many, We Are One". It beautifully speaks to the centrality of Jesus Christ and the crucial importance of unity in publicly funded Catholic education. It as well recognizes the significant contribution all within

our system make to the lives of students and to the fabric of our society and Church. Many times, over the past 2 ½ years I have referred to the over 4,00 men and women who generously serve in our Catholic schools and administrative centres as HEROES. I do so once again and on behalf of the Board of Trustees thank them for their goodness and commitment to, *“place Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre”* of students’ learning experiences;

- To the Teachers, Early Childhood Educators, Educational Assistants, Clerical, Custodians, Assistant Custodians, Maintenance, Child and Youth Workers, Para-Professionals (Speech Pathologists/Social Workers) and **all** central and school support staff for your invaluable service.
- To those who serve as Senior Managers, Managers and in central administrative positions in very important areas including Plant, Procurement, Finance, Budget, Planning and Accommodations, Transportation and Real Estate, Accounts, Printing, Shipping and Receiving, Human Resources, Media and Communications, Information Technology, Community Use of Schools and Catholic Library/Learning Commons. At all times but never more so than throughout the pandemic, your work has been essential to the realization of our mission.
- Principals, Vice-Principals, Chaplaincy Leaders, Consultants and Adult Faith Animator, Equity Officer, Mental Health and Indigenous Leads, for your faith filled leadership.
- To Assistant Superintendent of Education, Sandra Scime, and Superintendents of Education, Toni Kovach, Morris Hucal, Dean DiFrancesco, Julie Angiolillo and Tracey Ferrie for your critically important system and program leadership.

- Controller of Business Services, Nancy DeGiuli, and Superintendent of Human Resources, Angelo Romano, for your dedicated service and for always connecting the important work you do to the Christ centred mission of our school system.
- I want to express deep appreciation to Associate Director of Corporate Services and Treasurer, Paola Pace-Gubekjian for her many personal sacrifices, wise counsel, tireless work, goodness and extraordinary service. In their Pastoral Letter, *“Fulfilling the Promise”*, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario wrote;

“We believe that those entrusted with administrative leadership in Catholic school systems must be conspicuous for their goodness, sincerity and attachment to the faith. In other words, they are men and women who demonstrate in practice the very reason for the Catholic school system’s existence; an integrated Christian maturity, inspired by the Gospel and exercised in authentic freedom and commitment.”

Paola Pace-Gubekjian is one such person.

- In a particular way, I thank Director of Education, David Hansen. His faith-filled leadership and concern and care for the good of our system and all who learn and serve within it.
- On behalf of the Board of Trustees and personally I would like to thank Emilia Rastelli and Karen Krueger for their valuable work co-ordinating our meeting packages and providing support in so many ways.

I would like to express my deep personal appreciation to;

- My fellow trustees for your trust and confidence and for giving honour to the vocation of Catholic School Trustee.
- Pastoral Care Officer, Kelly Lazure-Valconi for her many kindnesses and for me and so many others, for at all times giving witness to the reality that there are “angels among us”.
- Marnie Jadon for her many years of wise counsel and support. Her tireless work and commitment to the good of our Catholic school system is truly inspiring.
- Lorena Madalena for her **invaluable** support and assistance. Her commitment and contribution to Catholic education goes well beyond our Catholic school system. Her efforts in support of the mission of both OCSTA and the CCSTA is very much appreciated by both of those Associations and through extremely challenging times has made a significant positive impact on their important advocacy work. I thank you as well Lorena for your strong work ethic and encouragement.
- I want to thank my four wonderful children, Michael, Kyle, Colleen and Monica and daughter-in-law Robyn. Their love and support in so many ways mean the world to me. I am so very proud of the people they are and how each of them has worked so very hard to realize their dreams. (Note Monica – election)
- Most especially and I know insufficiently/inadequately, I would like to thank my wife and best friend Carol. Her counsel, unfailing support, love and encouragement sustains and strengthens me. Her commitment to our Church, family and Catholic education is remarkable and a tremendous example to me.

I close in prayer, the words of St. John Paul II when he stated:

*“Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ,
of helping to form Christ in the lives of others.”*

That is my prayer that our decision making, words and actions throughout this term of office serve to “communicate Christ” and “helps to form Christ in the lives of students” and all associated with our Catholic school system.

Thank you and God bless each of you.