

Embrace the Spirit

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Religious and Moral Education Council
The Alberta Teachers' Association



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A Note from the Editor

This has been a long, drawn-out winter. It makes me wonder sometimes why so many people choose to live in Canada. Once my daily work and most basic commitments (like buying groceries) are done, when it is cold and stormy my natural inclination is to just hunker down with a good book and a cup of tea by the fireplace. In some respects, it is good to have those snow days when we are forced to stay home—to me they are a gift and I get an opportunity, sometimes out of boredom, to do some of those things that I have been meaning to do but never get a chance to do.

A long hard winter also makes us much more appreciative of spring. The sunshine, warmer temperatures and the sound of running water as the snow melts lift our spirits and energize us. For Christians, the disciplines and personal sacrifices of the forty days of Lent prepare us to appreciate the magnificence and glory of Easter and the celebration of the Resurrection.

Our spring issue of the journal has also been a long time coming, and I hope you find the articles and regular columns informative and helpful.

“Kaleidoscope” is back and features Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools. They embarked on an ambitious plan of service projects this school year, which we have captured in an article and pictures by Russ Snoble. If any school division would like to pull together some stories along with pictures of activities from three or more of its schools, you, too, can be featured in “Kaleidoscope.” The deadline for the fall issue is October 1.

Dan Kingdon, recently retired from Newman Theological College, discusses some of his experience and insights with Tim Cusack, our interviewer for “Salt of the Earth.”

Thanks also to Sharon Malec, Sarah Barclay and Michael Marien for their contributions to this issue.

We hope to see you at our fall conference, in Edmonton, in October.

Enjoy the new season!

Dorothy Burns



From the President

"Faith isn't just for Sunday mornings—it's a lifestyle choice that when woven into the fabric of daily life impacts a person's outlook, plans, purpose, decisions, home, health, relationships, success and legacy.

—Wanda Ventling

As members of the Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association, you have chosen the lifestyle.

When I wrote this, Easter was still to come, along with spring break or a week at Easter. I hope that each of you had a good rest as we begin to finalize our school year. Look forward to the awakening of the earth as new flowers blossom and animal babies are born.

I challenge you to renew friendships and make new ones. Take time from your busy schedule to spring clean. Your used clothing and household items will be welcomed by local charities and women's shelters. Give of your time to a soup kitchen, a food bank or a homeless shelter.

Participate in your community in any way you can, and live the lifestyle of choice.



Sharon Malec



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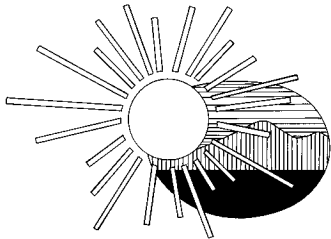
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Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Mission Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to inspire and foster learning communities by providing professional development for teachers to help them nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.

Vision Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers of all traditions and cultures, through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.



A Child's Ability to Know Religion

A Response to *The Religious Potential of the Child:
The Description of an Experience with Children from Ages Three to Six*,
by Sofia Cavalletti

Sarah Barclay

Sarah Barclay is currently in her fourth year of teaching. She has been teaching 100 Voices in Edmonton Catholic Schools for three years and taught kindergarten in her first year of teaching. Sarah's passion is working in early childhood education, and she believes in following a child's interests and dreams ... they will take them — and you — to amazing places!

Editor's note: 100 Voices is a faith-based prekindergarten program for 3½- to 5-year-olds. The class is Reggio inspired and focused on learning through play. Integration of the fine arts is prominent. Family nights are offered so parents and siblings can see the children's school experience.

A child is often thought to know less than an adult in most things. Children are deemed naïve and thought to have so much left to learn. In many cases these assumptions are correct. Children do, in fact, have much to learn and have much growing to do in many areas of their lives. This is why parents, teachers and many other adults in their lives make important and difficult decisions for

them. They are not yet ready to make consequential decisions for themselves, especially when they are as young as three, four, five or six. However, there are many areas in life in which children seem far advanced in comparison with adults. Children are able to express themselves with a freedom and truth that adults often seem to lose as they grow. Some may see this freedom as a quality that we desire to lose as we gain tact and responsibilities. They may see this freedom as an immature quality. Why, then, are children's sayings and ideas often considered so profound that it is unbelievable that they have indeed come from a child?

Religion is a sensitive subject that many people are unwilling to discuss. People often do not appreciate others telling them how to decide what is best for them and their children, especially when it comes to religion. When parents seem closed to an idea, it is often difficult for the child to be open or even to learn openness to the idea. By enrolling their children in a Catholic school, parents agree to

allow their children to be taught Catholic beliefs. However, Cavalletti raises an important question at the beginning of her book:

"Before beginning any discussion about the religious education of children, we should ask ourselves a basic question: Is it justifiable to give religious education to children?" (Cavalletti 1983, 30). She further states that we must ask ourselves if we are educating these children for the right reasons and, finally, that "it must be the child who tells us if the religious experience is or is not constitutive of his personality" (p 30).

In my classroom there are very young children who start the school year at three or four years old, and by the end of the year there are some five-year-olds. When I began teaching such a young group of students two years ago, I was unsure how I would broach the subject of religion. I understood that although there could be block periods of time that I taught the subject, I also needed to allow religion to permeate my day in the classroom and be a part

of everything we did. However, as I got to know my class, I found that few of them attended church and practised their Catholic faith at home. Some were baptized, but did not practise, and many were not Catholic at all. I was unsure how to reach these children and what my approach would be in teaching religion to them because I was sure that they had had no experience discussing or being a part of it. I wanted to allow them to experience a full sense of what it could mean to be Catholic and who the Lord was. Thus, last year and again this year I began by asking the children what they knew about God, Jesus, praying and anything else related to religion. I was surprised at the answers of these very young children; I knew that we would have a rich learning experience and that we would explore religion more deeply than I had expected. As Cavalletti states, "... there appears to be a difference between the child's natural and supernatural capacities, and that the religious element in children is not proportionate to the external stimuli" (p 36). I realized that even if religious stimuli from an outside source are missing, children often still experience religion and God in some way. They seem to feel Him and know Him. As I learned about what my students knew about religion, I anticipated what our journey would hold throughout the year.

Adults often cannot truly express what they are feeling or experiencing, whether it be about their faith or any other topic. Adults feel as though they are restrained by the norms of their society; as a result, they feel that they cannot say or know what they truly desire. Children, especially young children, do not have these

restrictions. "The world of the child's religion is a different world from that of an adult. The adult no longer has that open and peaceful relationship with God which is natural to the child" (Cavalletti 1983, 47). The child is free from so much that an adult is restricted by, and they are also free to have an open relationship with the Lord. This freedom is also evident in their expressions about Him. As adults we struggle to speak about how we feel about our relationship with God, but children will often tell you exactly how they feel and what they know.

In my classroom, I worked with two students and discussed two different topics in faith and religion. One child in my class (age five) experienced religion in her life regularly; however, it was not an everyday presence at home. During a free-play period one day I saw her drawing by herself, then scribbling out what she drew. I sat down and asked her what she was drawing, and why she felt the need to scribble it out. Our conversation was as follows:

Student: I don't know the way.

Teacher: The way to where?

S: To heaven!

T: What were you drawing?

S: A map to heaven.

T: Where do you think heaven is?

S: I don't know. I know that God and Jesus live there, and I want to go there one day too. Can you draw me a map so that I know how to get there?

T: Well, everyone has different ideas about where heaven is. Some people believe that heaven is above the clouds, and some people believe that everyone's heaven is different. They think that their heaven is full of what they love and that it is in a different place for everyone.

S: I think that heaven is special.

I think that I want to live with God and Jesus one day and be friends with them. Do you think that if I be very good, that I will go there?

T: God wants all people to join Him in heaven one day. If you want to be with Him, He would love for you to live with Him.

S: Yes, I do want to live there, and God will show me the way.

As I conversed with this child about heaven, I was astounded by her thoughts on what it meant to be in heaven. She knew that she wanted to live there; however, she was unsure how to get there. Her conclusion that God would show her the way was profound. She felt that if she put her trust in the Lord, she would be with Him one day. I am not sure that many adults can give this unfailing trust. After our discussion, the student seemed quite happy; of course, I hoped that it was because she felt an understanding about heaven. However, others could say that it had nothing to do with that, and her happiness simply came from the opportunity for her to spend some one-on-one time with her teacher. Cavalletti says that "One could argue that the child is fond of many things and that many things make the child happy, and this is true. However, joy has many qualities. We are dealing with a joy that puts the child in a peace that makes him serene and calm" (p 41). I see this every day in the faces of the students in my class when we speak of our faith and religion.

I believe that one of my most important objectives in the early childhood classroom is to instil in all students a sense of exploration and excitement to learn that will

carry them through their school careers. One of the true experiences a child will have is *wonder*, as Cavalletti explains: "Wonder is an exceedingly important stimulus for the human spirit. The nature of wonder is not a force that pushes us passively from behind; it is situated ahead of us and attracts us with irresistible force toward the object of our astonishment; it makes us advance towards it, filled with enchantment" (p 138). Throughout her book, Cavalletti speaks of an early learning program in which children explore and wonder openly, and how doing so is a focus of the program. The 100 Voices program is Reggio based. Regarding exploration, wonder and inquiry, Reggio and the program Cavalletti describes are very similar. Both philosophies believe that wonder should be the impetus behind learning. In my classroom, wonder is an important part of the religious aspect of our day. We wonder how Jesus can walk across water, we wonder if He has super powers, we wonder how God made all of the things on the earth and why He made us all look different. This wonder fills the students with a sense of curiosity and a desire to find out more.

When I teach different parts of the religion program, I watch the student's faces light up or look puzzled. I know that they are looking forward to exploring these ideas with me. The greatest excitement in my class comes around Easter. Last year we learned about the resurrection through using resurrection eggs. Each egg contained a different part of the story—a donkey, a cloth, a stone, a crown of thorns and so forth. Each day we would read a new page in the story and open a new egg. The class could not wait to see what

was inside each egg. The greatest wonder, however, came from the last egg, which was empty. Some students could not understand why the egg was empty, and some had very good explanations as to why this was so. One day, I listened to one of my students (age four) play with the eggs and tell the story. I took the opportunity to take a picture of him and write down what he had said.

- Crown—"The mean men put a crown of thorns on Jesus's head. They did not believe Him and wanted to make fun of Him, so they gave Him a mean crown, because they are mean."
- Cross—"Jesus got hanged up on the cross. He got nails in His hands that hurt Him very bad. He hanged there to help us. He died so that we can be happy! He wants us to be happy because God does."
- Cloth—"They wrapped him in cloth so that he wouldn't be stinky when He died. Then they put Him in the cave."
- Empty—"Jesus came alive again and then went to heaven to live with God. He isn't in the egg and we can't see Him. He isn't alive like me, but He is in here (puts his hand on his heart)."

When this student said this last sentence I was so happy for him. He knows that he will always have Jesus with him and that Jesus cares very much about our happiness. I had been teaching with these eggs for two weeks at this point and was thrilled that the students remembered some of the story. Cavalletti states "This is the second and most valuable moment of awareness ... It is the time of the conversation with the Inner Teacher, when the child reconsiders, without the adult, what has been presented and enters into its meaning." This is one of the

greatest hopes for every teacher—that students will take what we have taught them and use it in a way that makes sense to them. We hope that they are confident enough with what has been presented to them that they can adapt it to fit in their lives. My young student was able to do this, and I could not have been more excited for him.

In attempting to understand why children at such a young age, regardless of their experiences with religion beforehand, are able to bring such deep understanding to their faith and what it means to them, I found Cavalletti's words very wise. "If we were to venture an explanation of all of this, we could perhaps say that, since the religious experience is fundamentally an expression of love, it corresponds in a special way to the child's nature. We believe that the child, more than any other, has need of love because the child himself is rich in love" (p 44). I think that this is true. Children, for the most part, are so full of love because they are not sanctioned by the norms that adults are, and they are free to express this love with others. They also freely express their desire for love on a daily basis.

Because children are so adept at explaining how they feel and what they know to be true about their faith, it would seem unfair to deny them the opportunity to do so. I understand that not all parents wish for their children to grow in faith because they themselves did not, or they do not agree with it. I believe that this is truly children's decision to make, regardless of how young they are. Cavalletti spoke of many children who did not have religious influences in their lives yet craved it and begged their parents to allow them to

explore religion further. To deny a deep desire that perhaps will allow a child to live life more fully seems unjust, especially when children acknowledge such a desire at such a young age. "Therefore, it is from the point of view of moral formation as well that the religious experience before six years of age seems so important to us. Before this age, the relationship with God is established without contrasts; the child is free from any preoccupation and open to the encounter

with God and to the enjoyment he derives from it" (Cavalletti 1983, 155). I believe that the door must be open to children to explore and experience religion for themselves and that whatever decision they make—whether to live a life of faith or not—is truly theirs. If we do not open this door, we are allowing children to crave something so greatly without understanding why they do so. In Cavalletti's poignant words, "We ask ourselves if the adult's

sensitivity is sufficiently awakened to this immense problem, or if we are not culpable in letting the age pass by when, more than any other age, the child asks us for religious food and we leave him to a total fast" (p 156).

Reference

Cavalletti, S. 1983. *The Religious Potential of the Child: The Description of an Experience with Children from Ages Three to Six*. Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press.

\$300 ATA Specialist Council Grants

The ATA Educational Trust is a charitable organization dedicated to the professional growth of Alberta teachers. For this grant program, interested teachers may enter their name into a draw for \$300 towards the cost of an ATA specialist council conference.

In January of each year, the Trust posts application forms for grants and bursaries on its website. The deadline for conference grants is September 30, 2011. For details, go to www.teachers.ab.ca, and click on For Members; Programs and Services; Grants, Awards and Scholarships; and ATA Educational Trust.



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In Conversation with Dan Kingdon

Tim Cusack

Dan Kingdon was educated in Catholic schools, from Grade 1 to his BA, in Quebec and Ontario. He taught in Catholic schools for 31 years in Newfoundland, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia as a teacher, religious education consultant and principal. He has taught religion (often with a cooperating teacher) in all grades from kindergarten to Grade 12. He was the director of religious education at Newman Theological College for 11 years, with responsibility for the graduate diploma in religious education (GDRE) and the master of religious education (MRE). During his tenure, teachers became the largest full-time equivalent members of the college's student body. He has taught teachers as a sessional lecturer for Memorial University of Newfoundland, Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, University of Saskatchewan, University of Alberta and University of Victoria.

Tim: Dan, you have had a remarkable journey in serving the enterprise of Catholic education. I am wondering, through all your years of service and the variety of capacities you have served, what would you say have been the most challenging and the most rewarding

aspects of being a Catholic educator?

Dan: I was not always a proponent of Catholic education. My personal challenge was coming to a realization of the value of Catholic education. Because I had always attended Catholic schools, I presumed that Catholic schools were the norm. It took a while for a world view that saw education from the perspective of how Jesus reveals the love of the Father to sink in. While this internal transformation was taking place, Canadian society was becoming more pluralistic, more individualistic. Though pluralism and independence have much to recommend them, they do pose challenges to a faith-based education. We need to hold to a distinctive value that scripture and tradition bring to education without disparaging other belief systems, and we need to move people from independence to interdependence.

My administrative approach (33 of 42 years) has been to remove obstacles from teachers so that they could do their work while managing the agenda of the school so that its religious dimension was not forgotten. For example, each year as a staff we would set three major goals for the next year. One

of these was always a religious dimension. I began my administrative career thinking that I had to solve problems and initiate change. However, I soon learned that Catholic education is a group process. My most rewarding times were seeing staff decisions well planned, well executed and appreciated by parents, students and clergy.

Tim: How is Catholic education different today compared to when you first started teaching?

Dan: I see three differences.

1. Though I had religious teach me only from Grade 11 onwards, an order's charism characterized the religious dimension of most schools. The teachings of Vatican II about a baptized person's call to ministry and holiness were slow in taking hold. There was slippage in the 70s and early 80s as many administrators in Catholic schools slowly accepted their responsibility to lead this Christian community. This is now being addressed more intentionally by Catholic School Boards and the ACSTA.
2. Though many believe that religion is caught, not taught, I find this saying wanting. Being a model for our students is essential, but the advances in science,

technology and human rights require a well-informed and nuanced understanding of what it means to be a Catholic in this society. We've taken only limited steps in addressing the lack of a parallel religious formation to our teachers' well-developed educational formation. Too often we still think that being raised Catholic and attending Catholic schools and parishes addresses this deficiency. Though school boards and dioceses provide inservice to teachers, this model ensures that we are always playing catch-up. After all, we don't start teachers off teaching physics, and then promise them that courses and methods will be provided while they are instructing a class.

3. The stakes are much higher. In provinces with publicly funded Catholic education, challenges to Catholic schools have always existed. Usually, the courts and the constitution have supported Catholics' right to a separate public education. In recent years, we've seen how people's preferences and language can change this understanding. We must be careful at this time that we don't simply raise the clarion call to defend Catholic education. There are many things that we must face if we are to sincerely and honestly demonstrate to our supporters as well as society at large that we are making a significant contribution to the common good.

- a) The teacher in the classroom is the key. We must find a way to see that our teachers are appropriately prepared in both the *Catholic* and the *education* part of Catholic education. If this were done, we could
 - (i) handle the variety of practising and non-

practising Catholics in our classrooms because teachers could adjust instruction to balance evangelization and catechesis;

- (ii) handle the wishes of non-Catholics to send their children to Catholic schools. Historically, Catholic education was offered to all. Many of the strongest proponents of Catholic schools are non-Catholics. Well-formed teachers will appreciate the ecumenical dimension of what they teach, be prepared to enter interreligious dialogue with the world religions, teach without proselytizing and help all students appreciate the uniqueness of the Christian message as it is presented from our Catholic tradition;

- (iii) teach every subject from a faith-filled, nuanced world view that would integrate faith and culture. It is unrealistic to think that after two to four years in a public university where all views are presented as having equal merit, suddenly teachers will be able to articulate a Catholic world view that is respectful of others but firm in its own beliefs.

- b) We must examine the benefits that accrue to Catholic education from a publicly funded model. Because the funding for Catholic education comes from the public purse, society has a legitimate right to expect a reasonable level of accountability from us. It is

not clear to me that we will always be able to accommodate society's desires and goals for education. There are a number of nonnegotiables for us as Catholic educators. The innate worth of each child and the inclusive principle that treats every child similarly are occasionally threatened in this society. How far are we willing to go to meet the needs of each child regardless of level of need and corresponding resources? Are all programs available to all of our students? Are we able to accept society's world view as evidenced by specific courses, methods of assessment, etc?

- c) Catholic schools are ecclesial communities and must be seen as the heart of the Church. Catholic schools have 85 per cent of the people who potentially form the next generation of Catholic adults in Alberta. This is a wonderful opportunity to evangelize. It requires the development of a plan—parent, students, parishes, dioceses, school districts—to foster faith formation in our young people.

Tim: Who are some of the people who have influenced you during your journey as a Catholic educator? Is there a particular scriptural passage or guiding insight that has been integral to your journey?

Dan: I remained a cultural Catholic (raised in a Catholic community that was suspicious of the "other") until my second year of theological education. We were studying Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4: 6–7. Here Paul says that we are adopted as children of God [through Jesus]. This was mind blowing for me. I realized for the first time what Eastern Christianity

calls *divinization*. Our triune God was offering me [us] the life that God leads—something that I could never achieve on my own. My world view became more inclusive as we studied the documents on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue after Vatican II. In later years, I was struck by the fact that Jesus always seems to do the Father's will. His life is a response to what he understood the Father's will to be. This is the challenge that faces us all: What is the Father's will for me?

Tim: Dan, please talk to me about your work at Newman Theological College. How has the college affected your journey? What has been the greatest blessing for you in your ministry at Newman?

Dan: As the director of religious education, I was responsible for teaching courses, advising students, supervising master of religious education projects and theses, and promoting the program. Personally, the college has allowed me to grow both in my faith and in my professional life through regular and meaningful celebrations, talks, courses and activities. In a small college you have an opportunity to serve in many ways, much the same as what happens in a school with a small staff.

Professionally, I enjoyed working with teachers on their MRE projects and theses. These culminating activities allowed me to see and to be a part of how these teachers had integrated what they had learned from their studies at the GDRE and MRE levels, and how they applied this

understanding to a question touching on Catholic Education. I saw a maturity and confidence develop that assured me that the leadership of our Catholic schools was in good hands.

Finally, I was proud to be a part of the expansion of the religious education program into a variety of school boards in Alberta, but especially into the province of Saskatchewan, where the Board of Teacher Education and Certification has recognized the GDRE that began in Saskatoon in January 2010. I feel that there is great potential for joint projects to promote Catholic education that might be funded by these two provinces.

Tim: Thanks, Dan. If you could impart some words of advice to teachers who are just beginning their journey in the classroom, what would be your message?

Dan: Balance. It is impossible to do everything immediately. Don't put that burden on yourself. Find a mentor with whom you can talk frankly and who is discreet. Keep in mind the big picture. Relationship is at the heart of education. Let your students know that you care for them and are interested in them. You have a body, take care of it. Catholic education is a complicated process because you need to be faith formed as a Catholic teacher and you need to be professionally formed as an educator, *and* you need to integrate these two in your own person so that you can model this integration for your students. To accomplish this integration you need to pray regularly, be part of a faith community and

keep up with the subject matter that you teach. You can't do everything in each of these areas, but you can do a little in each, thereby laying a solid basis for the lifetime vocation of teaching in a Catholic school.

Tim: Dan, you have been a tremendous mentor and guide for so many teachers and administrators over the years. In conversation with graduates from the class of 2010, I have heard many comments about how you have been an integral part of the GDRE and MRE experience for so many. You have been teacher, advisor, mentor and friend to numerous others who have embarked on the path to further their faith formation. Now that you have entered that "promised land" of retirement, what are your plans for the years ahead?

Dan: Retirement has come at just the right time for Anita and me. She has been diagnosed with early stage Alzheimer's disease. This will become the dominant factor in our lives. Retirement will allow us to plan each day as we please. We know that we cannot put off to tomorrow, next week or next year, so retirement will allow us to do what we want to do now. Faith is a wonderful gift at this time. This phase is only one part of the blessing that has been our life together, and it is only one part of eternal life.

Tim: Dan, on behalf of so many students, I thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with me today and I wish you and Anita all the very best. May God bless you with much happiness and joy in your retirement.



Five Days of Service to Christ

A Lesson Plan for Teachers to Help Meet Five Basic Human Needs

Russ Snoble

Russ Snoble is religious education consultant and service project coordinator for Grande Prairie Catholic Schools.



Day 1: Clothe a Buddy—Mother Teresa Catholic School filled 55 bags with clothes



Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools serves Catholic students in the regional communities of Grande Prairie, Beaverlodge, Fairview, Spirit River and Sexsmith. Staff members of Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools are a team of approximately 400 people who provide educational and faith-based services to approximately 3,900 students in 12 schools, including one outreach school.

This year, from September through April, our Catholic school district embarked on a project to help educate all of our students about the importance of service to others by meeting five basic human needs. The project is a part of our school district theme entitled “Followers of the Way.”

Over the course of five weekdays, students examined and reflected on the role of food, shelter, clothing, education and faith in the lives of those around them. Using a Monday, a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday and a Friday, spread over the course of the year, students, staff and parents alike have been engaged in a series of opportunities to make a

difference in the lives of those around them.

The response to the project was overwhelmingly positive. Using a series of reflection for five school days prior to each event, the students spoke about, researched and discussed the reasons why this particular need and issue has occurred and how to alleviate the basic need. The student research on each day was done, from Grade 1 to Grade 12 inclusive, in such classes as social studies, language arts and religion.

While most of the actual physical labour for each of the five themes

is done after school, one event, "Help a Friend," was done on school time. It was the first time in the school district when everyone, students and staff alike, in every school and office was focused on one particular goal at the same time. At 9 AM on October 19, we walked together for three kilometres to give witness to our cause; a student/staff pledge of a nickel each helped raise a total of close to \$20,000 for the education of students who could not afford what other students had.

The project has been extremely successful in bringing our students

and local community service groups together. Students are more aware now of how they can become contributing citizens, even at an early age, and our many local community groups are more aware of how many students genuinely care about the well-being of others.

Our biggest challenge now is to follow up such a successful plan during the next school year. Many people are now telling us that they do not want to look back; rather, they want to find out how we can do more than we did this year. What a great challenge and opportunity to face!

Day 2: Help a Friend—École St Gerard School raised \$4,622.85



Year III Theme		Five Days of Service to Christ			
What Do We Do?		Serving Some Basic Human Needs			
Three Key Considerations	Day 1 (Monday)	Day 2 (Tuesday)	Day 3 (Wednesday)	Day 4 (Thursday)	Day 5 (Friday)
A) Local B) Hands On C) Archdiocesan in Nature	Clothing September 20, 2010 September 21, 2010 *STM*	Education October 19, 2010 9 AM start—all schools	Shelter January 12, 2011	Food February 3, 2011	Faith April 8, 2011
Scriptural Reference: Mt 25:31–37, Mark 10:17–20, James 2:1–9	Scriptural Reference: Luke 10:29–37, John 4:5–14, Gen 4:9	Scriptural Reference: Luke 10:29–37, John 4:5–14, Gen 4:9	Scriptural Reference: Mt 25:45–46, Mt 10:5–9, Heb 13:1–4	Scriptural Reference: Luke 9:10–17, Mark 8:1–10, Rom 12:14–21	Scriptural Reference: Ps 127:1, Mt 16:13–20, Acts 2:42–47
«Clothe a Buddy»	«Help a Friend »	«Sleep with Comfort»	«Food for Life»	«Restore the Church »	
Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity
★ Coats For Kids collection ★ New pajamas for Sunrise House ★ Clothing for Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program	★ 1 km/3 km fun walk/run (help for those in need in our school, eg, extracurricular, school/grad fees)	★ Bring a blanket/make a quilt ★ Bring mitts/socks	★ Food bank drive	★ Buy a shingle ★ \$5.00 pledge	
Each School Coordinator	Each School Coordinator	Each School Coordinator	Each School Coordinator	Each School Coordinator	Each School Coordinator
					
St. Bernard					

The Five Stages of Social Justice in Action in Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools

God doesn't look at how much we do, but with how much love we put into the doing.

—Mother Teresa

An integral component of education in a Catholic environment is the growth and development of each student in our care. Starting with the youngest of our charges, we endeavour to help them build skills and to give them experiences for a fully realized capacity for compassion and love for all of God's creations, with a particular obligation to care for the poor, disenfranchised and lonely people of the world.

Charity is a beginning step in the social justice work undertaken by our schools, regardless of grade level, since acts of charity are the driving force of social doctrine in the Church. At each of the five stages of social justice the acquisition of skills and knowledge is built upon so that, by stage 5, advocacy for structural change, students have moved from charity to justice in how they see their responsibilities as advocates of social change.

Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools has a long and impressive record of participation in acts of Christian charity that can be associated with the five stages of social justice. Below, after a brief description of each stage, is a sampling of what our schools have accomplished. The examples do not tell the full story of the experiences of charity for our students and staff, but they do

indicate the breadth and depth of commitment that can be found in our schools.

Stage One: Collections—Bring a Relief of Immediate Needs

Since we deal with children and young adults, it is not surprising that our Catholic schools do most of their social justice work at this stage. Acts of charity that involve collecting food for the food bank, winter clothing for Coats for Kids, or money for any number of worthwhile causes in our communities and our world constitute stage one of social justice.

Organizing collections is the starting place for social justice and exemplifies the constant need for acts of charity to ease suffering in our world. As well, collecting is tangible and goal oriented, which works best for young children and those taking the first steps to becoming active in social justice.

Examples of recipients of stage one collection projects are Terry Fox Foundation, Rotary House, Pregnant and Parenting Teens, Sunrise House (youth shelter), Odyssey House (women's shelter), cancer research, food bank, Catholic Family Services food hampers, World Vision, a foster child in Haiti, an orphanage in Haiti, SPCA, Kids Help Phone, Catholic Family Services, clean water and

Day 3: St Mary's School



malaria bug nets for villages in India (SOPAR), snack program for our schools, Red Cross, Canadian Blood Services blood drive, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, World Wildlife Federation, MS Society, Jump Rope for Heart and UNICEF.

Stage Two: Direct Service—Directly Filling Needs in the Community

As students get older they develop an interest in social justice and are better able to give more directly of themselves through time and effort. Stage two usually requires that students go to where the need is and be present for those who are being served. Projects in this stage require organization and careful thought so that young students are not put into situations that could be traumatic and older students are given the opportunity to reflect on their experience so that it is positive for everyone involved.

Stage two is where there is the greatest possibility for individual growth. Although it takes time to create and sustain the necessary relationships with community organizations so that social justice acts are genuine and enriching, it is time well spent and possible for students of every age and socioeconomic background.

Examples of the projects for stage two reflect the ages and

interests of the students and staff: help build a house for Habitat for Humanity, visit the local retirement home, volunteer at the Youth Emergency Shelter, make and serve lunch for an after-mass social, write letters to soldiers, make cards for people in hospital, prepare and serve a meal at Salvation Army, work with Social Services/Immigrant Settlement Services to welcome new immigrants to Canada, write and deliver valentines to neighbours, sing Christmas songs in the community, cook and serve dinner to a needy community, pack food for the food bank, make lunch for St Joseph's walk-in ministry.

Stage Three: Service for Empowerment—Empowering People for Lasting Change

The third stage of social justice asks students and teachers to commit to long-term relationships with groups and individuals in order to create permanent, positive change. Part of stage three requires that the givers of service recognize in themselves the gifts and knowledge needed by others that can be shared through service. Because this self-awareness is required, stage three typically engages students in action that empowers its recipients by providing them with new skills or experiences.

Implementing social justice actions that result in lasting change requires

that the students recognize the reality of delayed gratification. Often those who initiate the action in these acts of charity and justice will not see the effects, so, in an age of instant gratification, the need for the teachers to encourage research and reflection is paramount. Stage three is most commonly undertaken by older students and by entire schools where progress is tracked over years of service.

Although few, the stage three projects demonstrate that students are becoming personally involved in social justice actions: volunteer as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, make regular visits to the extended care facility, make and serve lunch to city homeless every month, contribute regularly to the parish lunch program, lunchtime tutorials and Tutoring for Tuition.

Stage Four: Reflection and Analysis

Undoubtedly, through the acts of charity and social justice undertaken by our schools, many people are helped with both immediate and long-term needs. It is also necessary, however, to care for the needs of our students as the givers of charity. Through reflection and analysis of the who, what, and why of their giving, students can begin to develop a personal commitment to caring for the world and its people. As adults, students will have no teacher or district directing or organizing charitable works; they need to build their



own perspective of justice in order to be active and caring after they leave our care.

Through exploration, inquiry and analysis students learn about the various (and many) needs of the world so that they can truly understand social justice issues and focus their energies where they see the greatest need and the greatest opportunity to help. Students and teachers reflect and do research so that they understand situations of need and their response to those situations. Before undertaking an act of social justice, during the execution of the work and after the goal has been reached, everyone involved needs to look at what they have learned and how they have grown as people.

The greatest measure of the growth of stage four is the number of student-initiated social justice actions, the number of students who become involved in social justice outside the school and the number of students who remain committed to social justice after they have left our care. Unfortunately, there is no spreadsheet to track this kind of personal growth, so we act in faith that participation in acts of social justice is a life skill that we have passed on to our students.

Stage Five: Advocacy for Structural Change

Of all the levels of social justice, stage five is the most difficult to

Day 5: Restore the Church—St Bernard's in Grouard



implement in a school setting. It requires that students follow their own passions and interests and take their commitment to a cause as far as necessary to create positive change. This kind of commitment is very personal and cannot be mandated by a school, nor can it be refused by a school if a student truly has the maturity and has demonstrated the desire to become involved with the struggle for change.

Therefore, stage five social justice actions will not be as numerous as actions in other stages

and will depend on like-minded students finding each other and being supported by the school. Projects for stage five show students responding to social issues of an international and universal nature. To choose and participate in these kinds of actions is the beginning of lifelong commitment to advocate for structural change.

Editor's note: the material in this article was based on the ideas in Journey to Justice, by Constance Fourré (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 2009).



On the Road to Spiritual Wellness

Tim Cusack

Tim Cusack serves with Edmonton Catholic Schools in the Archbishop O'Leary learning community.

The role of leader demands tremendous investment of energy, time and commitment in the well-being of others. In facilitating the myriad daily tasks that need to unfold on any given day, the leader must be acutely attuned to the needs of his or her people. This is not an easy task. In seeking to build capacity in others, the leader must appreciate the strengths and talents of his or her team. In knowing one's people, the leader is able to reach out beyond the mere operations of the organization and truly connect with people on a deeper plane of interaction. That is to say, the leader seeks to know people on a very human level, not just on a professional level. The leader is aware of what is important in the lives of others, such as milestones, special anniversaries or interests beyond work, and in being aware, demonstrates a level of care and concern

for the well-being of each team member beyond the four walls of the facility. This attunement or disposition to the importance of the other is the integral step on the journey towards being a leader of wellness.

Wellness advice comes in all shapes and forms these days. From self-help books and DVDs to webcasts and YouTube, there is a profusion of subject-matter experts who proclaim diets and exercise regimens to settle the inner self and a multitude of ways to restore physical and mental health. The reality is that it is a jungle out there, and if a leader is not careful about discerning what promotes a healthy balance of work and family life, that leader, in wanting to help others be well, tends to neglect him- or herself. We are all familiar with those preflight safety briefings when air attendants remind us that in case of emergency, we must don our own oxygen mask first before helping others. As counterintuitive as this seems for the servant leader, it is fitting advice. In seeking to examine the wisdom of "physician, heal thyself," I will briefly explore wellness from a biblical perspective. Through touching upon several scriptural excerpts

pertaining to wellness, it is hoped that Matthew's words, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but (only) those who are sick,"¹ will reinforce the need for leaders to genuinely look after their team, but not lose sight of the need to take good care of their own health.

We live in a world where, for whatever reason, we try to do it all. Production lines, deadlines and bottom lines often dictate a frenetic pace in the workplace. Some leaders seek to be a steadfast rock—the person who can endure anything and everything to achieve the mission despite the cost. Eating on the run, skipping meals, getting inadequate sleep and neglecting to delegate or ask for assistance with big-rock and little-rock items can quickly take one down the road to illness. In the book of Romans, we are told to let go of the worldly pace and trust more in God's will: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."² In this instance we hear a call to be transformed through the renewal of mind. This encourages us to come to our senses, so to

¹Matthew 9:12 (NRSV)

²Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

Speak, and reflect upon the fact that we are only human and need to let God's plan for us unfold in our daily toil. We need to take time to pause, pray, reflect and regroup. By not stopping to listen to our body's needs or not taking the time for a short break, we diminish our own wellness and, ultimately, our ability to provide the level of care and support that our team requires.

What other advice on wellness can be found in scripture? Consider the following and reflect upon what they suggest about how we should be good stewards of our own health:

- Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23
- I will never forget your precepts, for by them, you have given me life. Psalm 119: 93
- Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you. Isaiah 26:3

- And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? Matthew 6:27
- So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:34
- The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There is no law against such things. Galatians 5:22–23

These examples remind us that trusting in God is an essential part of wellness. In allowing God to lead us, we open ourselves to the power of his strength, his power of renewal and his ability to sustain us. As leaders we are reminded that “we are what he has made for us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”³ We are all called to be ministers of good works. This is particularly the hallmark of the religious educational leader. We must

confront the stress and struggles of daily toil, and by looking after our own health and well-being we can better support and promote the wellness of our organizations.

Through the struggles of the modern world with all its pop-culture trappings, we are called to lead others through the wilderness to the well of hope. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am humble and gentle in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁴ Jesus provides the perfect example of the leader who looked after his people by truly getting to know them. Yet in all he took on for us, and in all he did for his followers, Jesus took the time to regroup by going for walks, enjoying times of solitude and praying in the garden. All of these serve as inspiring examples to help us along the narrow way.

³Ephesians 2:10 (NRSV)

⁴Matthew 11:28–29 (NRSV)



Technology and Student Engagement in the Religion Classroom, Part Two

Michael Marien

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Web 2.0 in the Religion Classroom

In my last article, I identified four key questions that need to be asked when implementing new technologies into the classroom:

1. Will the technology enhance the lesson and engage the learner?
2. Will the learner be the primary user of the technology?
3. Will it bring down the walls of the classroom (real world teaching and learning)?
4. Will it help deepen their faith?

How we answer these questions as educators will determine the depth of the 21st-century learning in our religious education classrooms. Now, there is plenty of good news about the tools we call Web 2.0. First, they are readily accessible—if you have the Internet, you can download them or use them immediately. Second, they are affordable—many are free, and

some require a nominal membership fee. Finally, there are plenty of sites designed for schools that provide perfect opportunities for teachers and students to share their thoughts and their faith.

Let's take a look at some common practices found in the religious studies class, and see how they might be enhanced by Web 2.0. Please don't think that nontechnological approaches are somehow inappropriate or poor pedagogy—they're not! I use these practices because of their familiarity, and I hope they are a good place for you to start.

1. Instead of students drawing Bible stories, have them use Toondoo (www.toondoo.com). I have often asked myself about the merits of using three class periods of instructional time for students to express their understanding of a narrative from scripture—it seemed to me that they were spending more time on their art and less time thinking about the Bible story itself. Evaluation also becomes exceedingly difficult; does the best-looking image get the highest mark? That is always a danger. With Toondoo, students are on

a level playing field. Toondoo gives the students characters that will go into a web-based comic strip, so the students can spend more time on responding to the religion lesson than on the art. Of course, there will be perfectionists who will spend just as much time on the computer as they would on a drawing, but it is certainly worth a try.

2. Instead of students creating classroom skits about Jesus, have them create movies for the world. Making movies in the home has never been easier or more affordable—so it is in the school! Most schools have a digital video camera. One very student-friendly type is the Flip camera (www.theflip.com/en-ca). It is very sturdy, has fewer options than more expensive counterparts and is equipped with a flip-out USB port that allows downloading in one easy step.

Most schools and school jurisdictions have limited storage space, and digital videos can eat up gigabytes in a hurry. The solution is to house them on the web itself. Sites such as

www.vimeo.com are easy to use. Vimeo.com differs from YouTube in that it caters to those who actually make their own movies—there are no downloaded rock videos here. An even better site is SchoolTube (www.schooltube.com), a place where students can share their movies with other students in a safe environment. Just watch the engagement (and the quality!) when students know their performance will be a witness to the world.

3. Instead of students writing journal entries, have them publish their thoughts on a blog. The best educational site is Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org>). With Edublogs, you can set up your own site and have only your students access and respond in it. The tutorials to use this blog site are amazing, and there is plenty of online support for those who have never created a blog. You could also project it in the classroom, so all could watch as the blog dialogue develops.
4. Instead of students writing opinion papers, have them create podcasts. This has tremendous appeal to students and would allow you to differentiate your

expectations for students who struggle with writing. Two of the more popular sites to get your class started are www.podbean.com and www.mypodcast.com.

5. Instead of students hiding their cell phones (and texting) in class, have them engage in Poll Everywhere (www.polleverywhere.com). Here we might be going into uncharted waters—many of our schools have strict cell phone policies, mainly due to a lack of diligence in educating for the appropriate use of the technology. Whatever the reason for the policy, we miss opportunities for engagement with one of the most powerful technological devices—the cellphone. A principal recently told me about the senior high religious studies class he taught. He began by asking all the students to take out their cell phones; they did so reluctantly. He then asked them to text each other about the issue that was on the front board. Every single student in the class was involved in that lesson and had the opportunity to express an opinion. Poll Everywhere uses texting and tweeting to conduct in-class polls; the site has very clear directions on how to use it.

6. Instead of students raising money for anonymous causes, have classrooms link to other classrooms in developing nations. There are so many ways to connect to the world via the Internet. Sites such as the UNESCO site, www.unesco.org, <http://youth.devp.org> and <http://langwitches.org/blog/2009/01/03/around-the-world-with-80-schools> provide opportunities for students to see the world from their classroom and work for justice.

These six suggestions are certainly not a definitive list—they are starting points. For every website and application mentioned, there are better versions already developed or just around the corner. My best advice to you is to keep talking to colleagues and your tech support teams—they will be your best source for information about what is out there. And don't forget the students themselves—they can show you the latest technology, and you can guide them to appropriate use.

For more websites that will encourage and support your own faith life, please check out the faith pages I've created for my school division, at http://faithinyourfuture.ca/?page_id=2377.



RMEC Conference 2011

“World Religions in Dialogue: The New Frontier”

Friday and Saturday, October 21 and 22, 2011

Edmonton—details to be confirmed

Keynote: Father Stefano Penna





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Specialist councils' role in promoting diversity, equity and human rights

Alberta's rapidly changing demographics are creating an exciting cultural diversity that is reflected in the province's urban and rural classrooms. The new landscape of the school provides an ideal context in which to teach students that strength lies in diversity. The challenge that teachers face is to capitalize on the energy of today's intercultural classroom mix to lay the groundwork for all students to succeed. To support teachers in their critical roles as leaders in inclusive education, in 2000 the Alberta Teachers' Association established the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee (DEHRC).

DEHRC aims to assist educators in their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities to protect all students and to maintain safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. Topics of focus for DEHRC include intercultural education, inclusive learning communities, gender equity, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, sexual orientation and gender variance.

Here are some activities the DEHR committee undertakes:

- Studying, advising and making recommendations on policies that reflect respect for diversity, equity and human rights
- Offering annual Inclusive Learning Communities Grants (up to \$2,000) to support activities that support inclusion
- Producing *Just in Time*, an electronic newsletter that can be found at www.teachers.ab.ca; Teaching in Alberta; Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.
- Providing and creating print and web-based teacher resources
- Creating a list of presenters on DEHR topics
- Supporting the Association instructor workshops on diversity

Specialist councils are uniquely situated to learn about diversity issues directly from teachers in the field who see how diversity issues play out in subject areas. Specialist council members are encouraged to share the challenges they may be facing in terms of diversity in their own classrooms and to incorporate these discussions into specialist council activities, publications and conferences.

Diversity, equity and human rights affect the work of all members. What are you doing to make a difference?

Further information about the work of the DEHR committee can be found on the Association's website at www.teachers.ab.ca under Teaching in Alberta, Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.

Alternatively, contact Andrea Berg, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca for more information.



Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal *Embrace the Spirit* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

- Classroom and school projects
- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the author's name, professional position, address and phone number(s). Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at the end of the article.

Send contributions or enquiries to the editor: Dorothy Burns, 1 McRae Street, Box 1318, Okotoks, AB T1S 1B3; phone 403-938-6051 (res) or 403-938-4265 (bus); fax 403-938-4575; e-mail dburns@redeemer.ab.ca.

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.

