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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Principals: Agents of Hope

In his latest book, *Catholic Education: Ensuring a Future*, Father James Mulligan reports, "The expectations placed upon Catholic school principals today are frighteningly challenging. The rewards and satisfaction are not always evident." While this observation has never been more appropriate, principals and vice-principals continue to answer the challenges that face them with startling efficiency, energy, and resolve. Principals and vice-principals routinely rise to the occasion as instructional leaders, peace keepers, social workers, psychologists, surrogate parents and spiritual leaders. One might indeed ask how, as a group, we continue not only to survive, but thrive under such high expectations. The answer, I believe, is twofold in nature. First and foremost, it rests in the notion that as Catholics we are a people of hope. This virtue, especially appropriate during the season of Advent, remains inherent to the mission and vocation of Catholic school leaders. We are, as Mulligan suggests, "agents of hope". Secondly, contrary to Mulligan's thoughts, the role of principal or vice-principal continues to offer rewards and satisfaction at the highest level.

As Catholic leaders in the province of Ontario, there is much to hope for as we approach a new year. We remain hopeful, of course, for continued support for the Catholic education system; as Mulligan points out, not a given in today's political climate. We hope for continued growth in literacy and numeracy, along with the corresponding EQAO results that will give evidence to the amazing work our teachers do in their classrooms every day, even though we recognize that not all things that count can be counted. We continue to hope for a reduction in what Michael Fullan calls "low yield strategies" such as an ineffective teacher performance appraisal model that is, at best, cumbersome and at worst, redundant. We refuse to give up hope that adequate support for safe school initiatives will arrive to help us eradicate bullying from our schools. We hope that teacher mentorship plans come to fruition to support our new teachers in their vocation; that daily physical activity can be successfully implemented, and that supervision remains in the realm of teachers who are trained to recognize, respond, and prevent bullying behaviour on our school playgrounds.

As I journey throughout the province, I am amazed by the spirit of hope displayed by our principals and vice-principals. This spirit presents a clear message to those who would doubt either our mission or our resolve. In Mulligan's reflection on the future of Catholic education in Ontario, he reports that

throughout the province, "... one positive voice was heard several times. A new player, assuming a very important role, has become a partner in the Ontario Catholic education community – the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario." Mulligan continues in pointing out the positive Catholic nature of our Principal's Qualification Program. We have indeed become agents of hope not only for our students, but for Catholic education in Ontario.

While the rewards and satisfaction we experience as principals and vice-principals are not always evident, they are of an extremely high quality. These rewards are intrinsic in nature and elicit a sense of pride and satisfaction that can only be realized through service to others. Who among us would not feel rewarded by transforming a school of marginalized into a community of hope and genuine caring? Is there one among us who would not feel intense pride at bringing a staff together as a professional learning community to promote the common good of the students they serve? And who would not be overjoyed to read the names of past students on the Dean's list at a college or university? How can one describe the emotion of having past students seek you out at a school reunion to remind you of how you changed their lives? As leaders of school communities, we experience the satisfaction and rewards of turning failure into success, despair into hope, and divisiveness into community. Can there be higher rewards?

It is true that the challenges of being a principal or vice-principal in Ontario today are extremely high with expectations approaching the unmanageable, but the rewards and satisfaction are clearly evident to those who have made this their vocation. On a personal level, I have been blessed this year by the opportunity to witness the outstanding contributions made to the lives of our students by our members throughout the province – truly inspiring!

As the blessed season of Christmas approaches, I invite you to take time to reflect on the gifts and talents you have unselfishly shared with your school communities throughout the year. May you be filled with the sense of satisfaction and pride you so richly deserve.

May the Lord Jesus truly bless you during this wonderful season of Christmas and may your holiday be filled with the gifts of peace, joy, hope and love.

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