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Who Will Answer the Call?

Most Catholic school supporters are aware of the Waldeman case at the United Nations and the implications it could have for publicly-funded Catholic education in Ontario. Beyond Waldeman there are pockets of dissent that arise around the province from time to time. At the provincial level there are two organizations calling for confederated school boards. No matter the source, Catholic school supporters must be vigilant and proactive in order to safeguard the Catholic school system.

Tom Reilly, the General Secretary of the Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) has summarized the strengths of the Catholic system which include a holistic approach which attempts to reach the students at all levels and modes of being human; an insistence on excellence in the sense of fully developing the talents that God has given to each person; discipline in the sense of teaching and trying to abide by a moral code; and community with a sense of being distinctive. His points address the intrinsic values that drive the system at a foundational level. However, there is a need to be aware of external pressures on the system and to prepare a focused, convincing response to those challenges. In order to make such preparations the system must ensure that voices are ready at all levels from Church officials and politicians, parents and trustees, students and teachers, principals and supervisory officers.

For its part CPCO is actively engaged in advocacy for Catholic education. A primary focus of the president's field visits to members is to review this advocacy through reports on CPCO activities with partner organizations, government and the membership itself. Two notable events occurred in the last few months – an inaugural meeting with the OECTA provincial executive and an historic presentation to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association annual seminar that included chairs, vice-chairs and directors of education. The feedback from OCSTA confirmed that our message of advocacy was clearly heard and appreciated by the audience.

CPCO is very well known at provincial organizations like the Institute for Catholic Education, the Ministry of Education, EQAO and the Ontario College of Teachers. Members from the field fill more than 50 representative chairs and they collectively bring forth a clear and consistent message that recognizes the effectiveness and contribution of the Catholic school system in Ontario. Gone are the days when one agency or another "forgets" to invite a CPCO representative to its committee or focus group. By the same token, the CPCO president is a phone call away when the Minister of Education wishes to discuss a new initiative or an implementation issue. These calls provide an excellent opportunity to present a Catholic principal's perspective.

Our professional development programs are another key venue for advocacy. The Principal's Qualification Program has been viewed by teacher-participants as a powerful, faith-filled leadership development opportunity. The program is endorsed by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and is the preferred Principal's Qualification Program in most Catholic boards. CPCO has offered the PQP (Part 1 and Part 2) in 17 different Ontario cities during the last four years.

For aspiring and newly appointed school administrators CPCO offers the Catholic mentoring course. This program has been selected by several boards and is being refined for delivery in others. Just as the government has focused on new teachers through the New Teacher Induction Program, more boards are turning their attention to supporting newly appointed administrators. The CPCO mentoring program is going to become a significant part of future board plans.

For veteran administrators CPCO offers almost 50 professional development programs that are designed and delivered with a focus on Catholic leadership. The newest program is the leadership retreat entitled "Living Parables, Sowing Seeds" which includes a CD of liturgical music performed by our members.

CPCO has been active in the development of future senior management through its membership on the board of the Catholic Curriculum Delivery Organization that offers the Catholic Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program. Perhaps the opportunity will arise some day soon for CPCO to be a full partner in this program in the same way that OPSOA and OPC deliver SOQP in the public system.

In closing let me highlight a very important initiative that is only a few months away. The Institute for Catholic Education is reconvening a symposium in Toronto on November 24-25, 2006. This event reprises the efforts made in November 2002 and will provide significant opportunities for all Catholic school supporters to dialogue on the current and future issues that face our system. Fr. Jim Mulligan wrote a book entitled, *Catholic Education: The Future Is Now*. Let us hope that there are many voices among our membership who will be prepared to answer the call now to protect the future of Catholic education.

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