



**Don Rait**  
CPCO President

## Smile for the Camera

Have you ever felt like you were on “Candid Camera”? Lately, I have had the impression someone is watching me. I recall the day the parking lot machine refused to give me my Visa card back. I looked around to see if anyone witnessed the problem I was having. Would my card ever come back? Somehow, after five minutes the card popped out and I made my way to the nearest store to change a \$10.00 bill. It always appears one has to spend money, in this case \$1.14, to get change for a parking meter that costs \$2.00 every half hour.

My next encounter was with the parking lot gate at the CPCO office. I drove up thinking that the gate would magically open and allow me to enter the underground parking lot. I got out of the car to see if there was somewhere to insert my card. Finding no slot, I waved my card in every direction hoping some type of sensor would scan it. There was no way I was getting beyond that gate. Where were the cameras? Someone must be watching. These were my first experiences back in Toronto, where I had spent my childhood. However, walking along Eglinton Avenue and trying to find parking was a far cry from playing Robin Hood on a summer's day in High Park.

Memories of my elementary school experience at St. Vincent de Paul invaded my mind. Mother Frederica was the principal throughout my elementary school years. Her tall figure, dressed in the black habit of the Sisters of Loretto, was ever-present. Her office, to me, was more of a throne, a seat of power. Anything she wanted done was done. Brother Benedict was principal at De la Salle College for the year I spent there. Through his influence, a high academic standard was paramount. Holy Cross, in Dunkirk New York, became my home and school for the next three years. Father Matthew and Father Mario were the directors of students. Father Matthew administered from his office, but Father Mario was ever-present, roaming the halls, walking into classes and meeting us on the sports fields. His short bulky presence was in stark contrast to Mother Frederica. The long rosary, he wore around his waist, could always be heard scraping the floor as he walked the corridors. Many of us may have similar memories of priests, brothers and sisters who were our teachers, but more often our principals. We were the ones watching them. Our eyes were their candid cameras.

The times have certainly changed. The role of Catholic principal, once the almost exclusive domain of the clergy and the religious, is now in the hands of the laity. How does this impact on our role as educational leaders in our Catholic schools? We have not been ordained or taken vows, yet we have been given numerous graces

to help us in our role of Catholic school principal. It is important to realize that in God's special way, we were each called by name to this vocation of principal. If we recognize this, we begin to understand the significant difference we are expected to make in schools. We have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and called to be sacrament to those we serve.

We have been given the following graces:

- *Commitment* - the will to press on, to do what is necessary and what is right, to overcome obstacles even when afraid;
- *Confidence* - the unshakable belief in yourself, that you can make happen what you want to happen; (Confidence allows you to keep trying until you get better, to seek help and advice. Confidence is infectious. If you believe in yourself, others will believe in you and themselves.)
- *Focus* - the ability to stay on track, to organize yourself, and to reduce distractions;
- *Discernment* - the ability to separate what is immediately pressing from what is truly important;
- *Passion* – the ability to be enthusiastic, upbeat, and optimistic;
- *Respect* – the ability to see the value in what others say and do, and celebrate their insights and accomplishments.

Each of these sacramental signs gives us the strength to fulfill our call to the vocation of Catholic leader.

As you walk the halls of your school this new year, remember you are walking in the footsteps of many great leaders. Make sure you smile for the camera! Someone is watching.

Have a fantastic year!

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