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## It is Time to Turn Off the Lights

I often visited classrooms to enjoy the learning and to be present as a real part of each student's life. Each visit gave me a greater appreciation for the wonderful diversity of activities that take place in a school each day - a child sharing a story, a math activity challenging young minds, a song spilling out into the halls.

One day I walked into a Grade 8 class where students were discussing a song. As I listened to the conversation, I was amazed at the depth of understanding displayed. During the lesson, a student began to have a seizure. Without missing a beat, the student closest to the light switch got up and turned off the lights. The room became quiet. Every student in the class knew what to do. The young girl had had seizures before. Most of her classmates had been with her since kindergarten and understood that silence, encouragement and darkness would assist in helping her overcome the seizure. The girl's educational assistant calmly encouraged her. A few other students who were close by whispered, "Come on. You can do it." Two minutes passed before I heard, "Way to go. It's OK." The episode had passed. The light monitor turned on the lights and the class continued as if nothing had happened. What a powerful moment. It was a lesson that could never have been planned.

During the season of Lent, we, in a real sense, turn off the lights. Our lives are very busy but I believe that nature and the church remind us to slow down, reflect on what we are doing and put things into the proper perspective. My visit to that grade 8 class sharpened my focus. The darkness that filled the classroom was a desert experience of Lent. Like the veiled statues in the church during our Lenten journey, we remove all distractions before our eyes.

The workload that we have as principals and vice-principals has grown exponentially each year. Duties that superintendents and inspectors had 30 years ago are now the responsibilities of the principal. The list boggles the mind. As our focus has been sharpened, the pressure to achieve has become urgent. There are great things happening in Ontario education but I wonder at what cost. In most boards throughout the province, more and more principal and vice-principal time is taken up with student supervision. More students require interventions beyond the classroom academic expectations. Special education programs are in tremendous need and boards are struggling to find the funds to balance budgets. As more money appears to flow into the boards for targeted initiatives, there appears to be a widening gap in areas of perceived need and areas of stated need.

The words moral imperative, servant leadership and character education are the current buzzwords in Ontario. However, these concepts have taken on a very different meaning from the Catholic

context with which we are familiar. Servant leadership is used in the context of student success. The moral imperative is equated to student achievement. It has been suggested that Catholic schools must dig deeper in developing character education.

I think it is time to turn off the lights or maybe as Andy Hargreaves would have it, "Instead of getting a larger bucket maybe we should just turn down the tap" (Institute for Education Leadership Symposium, Dec. 2006). This is what the season of Lent offers us. We need time to reflect. We need time to appreciate the wonderful things around us. We have to realize that there are only a few things in life that are *really* urgent.

As we step into the coming season of spring and as new life slowly begins to appear, let us be ready to turn on the marvelous light of the Resurrection. In turning on that light, let us recommit to being sacramental people. Let us recapture the true meaning of our moral imperative, which is to bring the message of the risen Lord to all those we meet. As servant leaders let us understand our discipleship. Our Catholic community need only look at the Beatitudes for a framework for character education:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 5: 3-10

May the light of God's divine love fill our schools with His moral imperative. In that light, we will celebrate the great feast of Easter.

**Happy Easter!**