



Don Rait
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The Art of Catholic Leadership

Nature often reminds us that there are things humankind cannot control. One evening in May 1986 our family celebrated our son's birthday. As we sat eating our special birthday dinner we took no notice of the rain beating down outside the restaurant. After dinner the rain had stopped but something strange was in the air. As we approached Tottenham on our way home, our normal route was blocked off. We soon discovered, that a tornado had hit ground in Grand Bend and made its way east over the highlands of Dufferin county and unto the glacial moraines of Simcoe county. It continued south of the town and there was fear another tornado was approaching.

At school the next day, everyone was talking about who had been affected. Four families from our school had lost either all or part of their homes. Ironically our school was performing *The Wizard of Oz*. The proceeds from the play went to the disaster relief fund. During the next few weeks the most marvelous acts of kindness took place, illustrating what is most important in society.

Turn the page to 2007. Where does caring and compassion fit into schools today? Bishop Paul André Durocher and Fr. Ron Rolheiser spoke on this topic at the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) symposium. Premier Dalton McGuinty stated that the true hallmark of a great society is how it demonstrates care and compassion. Schools, at times, are caught in the web of bureaucracy: our accountability to policies, procedures, legislation and regulation. Even though they are meant to protect what is presumed the common good, they can impact negatively on our capacity to act with care and compassion. Expediency, consistency and equity move us along a problem solving line that can at times negate the first principles of care and compassion. *Character education* is not an invention of this government. It has been at the heart of every Catholic school since the beginning of our existence.

Throughout 2006-07 CPCO has worked tirelessly on behalf of Catholic principals and vice-principals. The issues that CPCO has worked on and will continue to strive for as the years progress, pale in comparison to our work in building healthy Catholic communities. In the face of continuing assaults on Catholic education, we must be ever aware of those who find our existence redundant.

As publicly-funded education begins to stress the merits of character education and use words like "moral imperative" and "servant leadership" to signify the importance of student success, we as Catholic educators, must realize the importance of our unique language. Our language is not meant to just fit into the educational system; it is the root of Catholic education. Our role as leaders is to be gospel people, to focus our schools on and in the stories of our faith, to understand and exemplify how our schools are sacrament.

The first public act of Jesus took place in the temple as a young child. In a mysterious sense, placing Jesus in the temple teaching to the elders brings a sacramental meaning to the role of our Catholic schools. In a very real sense, our schools are outward signs following the example of our first teacher. The sacramental nature of Catholic schools now more than ever requires explicit demonstrations of our faith. Our schools not only teach the gifts of the Spirit, we model them. Our schools do not merely inform our students about the Fruits of the Spirit, we demonstrate them. Our schools each day are temples of the Beatitudes. As we journey in Catholic education, we walk together with Jesus on the sacred roads he traveled. Our journeys have their beginning and end in the heart, mind and spirit of Jesus. When we speak to teachers, students and parents, we walk the road of the Resurrection and celebrate.

The act of building positive relationships should never take second place to making sure all the liabilities are covered. In our roles as educational leaders, we are too often judged by our sins of omission. That deficit model of evaluating pushes us onward. Instead of spending time enjoying the successes of the moments past and present, we are urged to move toward that next level of achievement. In the rush to achieve one can often move in directions that create dangerous scenarios.

We are challenged each day to be more than educational technocrats. Today take the time to enjoy the art of leadership and education. Enjoy painting on your educational canvas or composing that magnificent symphony we call school. If caring and compassion are the keys to a just society, then enjoy and celebrate the fantastic accomplishments of your school and your community. What is urgent for us today is to stop and enjoy the beauty of our schools.

There will always be tornadoes that attempt to destroy what we have accomplished. Sometimes the winds and pressures of societal change will challenge our very foundations. We must always remember that our schools are not merely built on stone.

*We hold a treasure, not made of gold, in earthen vessels
wealth untold. One treasure only, the Lord, the Christ, in
earthen vessels.*

2 Corinthians 4:6-8

On a personal note, I thank the members of CPCO, the staff and the Executive Council for supporting me during this year. To my wife Theresa who is our family's anchor of faith and well of hope, to Chris and Elana, Jacquelyn and Dave, Elizabeth and Peter, Patrick and Falyn, Matt and our grandchildren Jessica and Caitlin thank you for your love and inspiration.