

# Answering the Call to Leadership

By **Nelly Kelders**, Member Services Director



Early one morning a mother went to her son's room.

*Wake up, son. It's time to go to school.  
Oh Mom, I don't want to go to school.  
Son, give me two reasons why you don't want to go to school.  
One, the kids all hate me. Two, the teachers all hate me.  
Come on son, you have to go to school.  
Oh Mom, give me two good reasons why I need to go to school?  
One, you are forty-four years old. Two, you are the principal.*

Why would anyone want to become a principal?

The role of the principal has changed considerably in the last 10 years. School administrators have been taken out of the teacher unions and are now considered management. They have personal service contracts rather than collective agreements. Job security is no longer guaranteed. Workload and responsibilities have increased substantially. The principal is expected to be all things to all people: mentor, coach, guidance counsellor, spiritual leader, instructional leader, cheer leader, social worker and the list goes on.

The Ontario College of Teachers in its September issues in 2005 and 2006 carried the results of teacher surveys which included a question about their interest in becoming a principal or vice-principal. Twenty-four per cent of respondents in 2005 expressed extreme interest in the position but by 2006 the interest had dropped to five per cent with another 13 per cent indicating they were somewhat interested. The main motivators to becoming a principal were the ability to improve schooling and enjoying the role of leader. The main inhibitors to the position were job politics, middle-management stress, dealing with worried parents, students in crisis and disciplinary issues.

All partners in education agree that the principal is key when it comes to school improvement and instructional leadership. Educational researchers such as Michael Fullan and Kenneth Leithwood continue to stress the importance of this leadership role in making effective change in schools across the province. Yet as we near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century we may be facing a shortage of highly qualified Catholic educators to step into the void being created as the baby boomers enter into retirement.

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario has been delivering the Principal's Qualification Program (PQP) since 2001. CPCO is an accredited provider of the Ontario College of Teachers and therefore the PQP courses follow the required guidelines. The difference between the CPCO program and that of our colleagues

in the other principal associations and the universities is that we reflect our Catholic beliefs and gospel values in the modules taught. Candidates in the program are not only prepared to become school administrators but also to see their leadership as a vocation. The role of the Catholic principal is an awesome responsibility but at the same time very fulfilling for the people who embrace its calling.

One of the requirements of the PQP is the completion of an electronic evaluation survey at the end of the program. From the surveys we have learned that:

- the ratio of elementary to secondary candidates is approximately 3:1;
- the ratio of female to male is 3:1;
- 35% of the candidates have 16 or more years of teaching experience;
- 45% of the candidates have between eight and 15 years of teaching experience;
- 20% of the candidates have between five and seven years of teaching experience;
- 66% of the candidates enter the program with two specialist or honour specialist additional qualifications;
- 45% of the candidates learned about the CPCO PQP through their principals; and
- 35% indicated they learned about the PQP through a colleague or friend.

Candidates in the summer 2007 PQP were asked what motivated them to take the Principal's Qualification Program. These responses are indicative of the majority:

- *I have been encouraged by my board and administration at my school to explore the idea of becoming an administrator.*
- *It was the encouragement of my principal and others in the education field as well as some friends who are clergy.*
- *I plan to move into administration and feel a Catholic principal should be trained in the Catholic program.*
- *My principal asked if I was interested in taking the program.*
- *I was interested in pursuing a leadership position in the future. I decided to take Part I of the PQP to determine whether or not school administration was the direction I wanted to take.*
- *I took the course for the professional development and personal development. I also want to develop my leadership skills. Perhaps I will think more seriously about becoming a principal in the future.*
- *At this stage in my career I feel a calling to serve on a larger playing field and feel that I have much to share with my school community.*
- *I took the PQP because I know that to make the biggest*

*difference for students one must be a principal.*


- *Catholic education is at risk and our system is in need of committed faith leaders. I felt a responsibility to be able to answer the call if and when I am called.*
- *I feel the time is right for me to take on a Catholic leadership role. My family commitments are changing and I am looking for new challenges.*
- *I am interested in pursuing a position which will allow me to have a greater influence in the education system.*
- *I decided to take the PQP course because a colleague mentioned that it was the best professional development she had ever received.*
- *I felt inspired by my principal to develop my leadership abilities.*
- *I have been a successful acting administrator on many occasions for the past several years and am looking forward to a new challenge after 25 years of teaching. Numerous administrators have convinced me to become qualified.*

A strong viable Catholic school system is dependent on the leadership it develops. Principals and vice-principals have the opportunity to mentor and nurture the future leaders of our schools. Michael Fullan has stated that successful leaders are recognized by how many leaders they leave behind when they exit the scene.

Promoting leaders takes time, work and often persistence. Not all teachers see their potential when it comes to school administration and they need encouragement to take the next step. Principals can help to develop the leadership skills of staff in a variety of ways:

- walk the talk through your actions and attitude; being a principal is the best vocation in the world;
- share stories about the positive aspects of the job since most people only see the challenges;
- tap teachers on the shoulder letting them know they have leadership potential;
- discuss and support the career paths of teachers;
- listen actively before you provide feedback;
- offer opportunities for leadership roles in the school;
- make staff aware of opportunities and encourage participation on school/board committees;
- provide articles and books on leadership and educational research;
- encourage staff to take additional qualifications (specialist qualifications, a master's degree);
- promote professional development workshops/conferences;
- praise and acknowledge the leadership initiatives happening in the school/board;
- inform senior administration of the leadership potential of staff members;
- announce and post the dates and locations of the CPCO Principal's Qualification Program.


By celebrating the development of leadership skills and talents of staff, school administrators are embracing their commitment to their school communities to provide an environment steeped in learning and mutual respect. As we enter into another school year make it a goal to find the lights hiding beneath the bushel and allowing them to shine forth in service to the community they serve.




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