

WE ARE CALLED

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Many, many years ago, in a city far away, and at the tender age of one week, I was taken to St. Andrew's Church, and, totally unconscious of the great event that was happening to me, but according to my mother, contributing to the ceremony with a prolonged and protracted wail, I was baptized. At that moment I was called by God, and not only called, but called by name. We read in the prophet Isaiah these wonderfully consoling and affirming words:

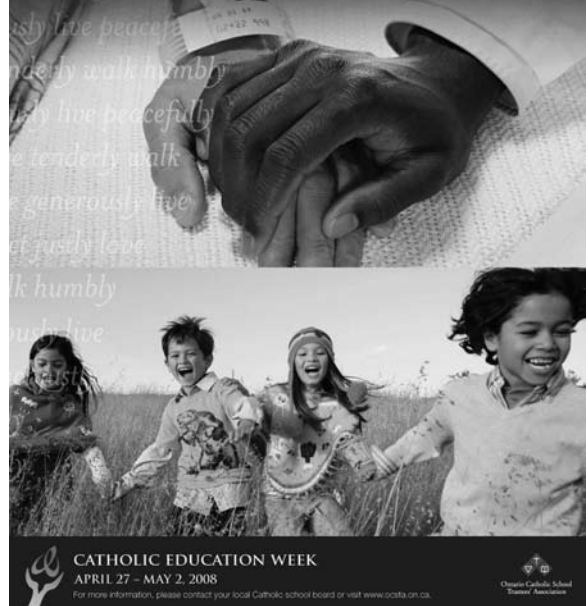
But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

Vocation, from the Latin verb *vocare* meaning *to call*, is a word that we Catholics often associate with a calling to the priestly or religious life. Nowadays, we are more conscious that calling, in the sense of it being a call from God, has much wider applications and extends in an equally true fashion to lay people. Our first and most fundamental calling is that of our Baptism and all the other callings in our life flow from that unique and foundational first call. If this is true for all Christians, it is especially true for those involved in Catholic education, regardless of what role or position we hold within that "enduring gift."

It is a personal call. God calls us by name. Most of us had little choice in the selection of the name, which we received at Baptism. But it is our name; the name by which we are identified and known; the name which is uniquely ours. One of the more humiliating, degrading and dehumanizing tools of oppression is to reduce the human person to a number. It denies us our originality and our individuality. In calling us by our name, God marks us as uniquely individual and important and says, "You are mine!" As teachers we know the importance of knowing our students by name.

The theme for Catholic Education Week 2008, *We are Called* flows logically and theologically from the themes of 2006, *And God saw that it was Good*, and 2007, *Created in the Image of God*. We move from the creation of the universe, to the unique creation of the human race, to God's calling of each of us individually. The focus narrows from the wide expanse of all creation to the wonderfully unique calling of each of us, by name. It is God pointing out to each of us that having seen the creation of the world as *good* and the creation of humankind as *very good* that each individual human being is special to God because that person had been called by God by name.



The implications of that unique Divine call are clarified for us by the prophet Micah when he elaborates on the question of what does God require of us as a consequence of our calling. The answer is profound and demanding in its simplicity, "only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8)." The *only this* is beguiling in its candour. At first glance, the challenge does not appear to be too daunting or too difficult. It is concise, understandable and maybe even simple. Intellectually, we grasp the essential details; emotionally, we perceive the nobility of the direction and then we look for the courage and the willpower to see it through. Somewhere along the road of acting justly and loving tenderly and walking humbly, our redeemed but frail human nature wearies of the quest and our response weakens. But the beauty of being human is that even though we are very capable of making mistake after mistake, and piling stupidity upon stupidity, the grace of a benevolent and forgiving God is always there to *strengthen the limbs gone weary and the hands that are failing*. The God that calls us provides the courage and the strength to pursue the call.

Called, as no one else in *This Moment of Promise* to a role of leadership in Catholic education, principals and vice-principals confront Micah's exhortations from a position of added responsibility. In the somewhat and sometimes confrontational climate of school life in Ontario in 2008, principals may find that their efforts to incarnate Micah's exhortations are met with misunderstanding, cynicism and even an element of secular scorn. We are expected to be beacons of hope to those we serve be they student, staff, parent or a person from the local community. Our world is in need of hope; not the wishful thinking of the day-dreamer, but the solid, life-giving, faith-enhancing Christian virtue of hope of which Pope Benedict speaks so forcefully and even passionately in his recent remarkable encyclical, *Spe Salvi*. The Pope's chosen subject highlights a critically urgent need of our times; without God there is no hope. That is the God who has called us, the God of our Hope.

For further information and support materials for Catholic Education Week 2008, visit the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association website at www.ocsta.on.ca.