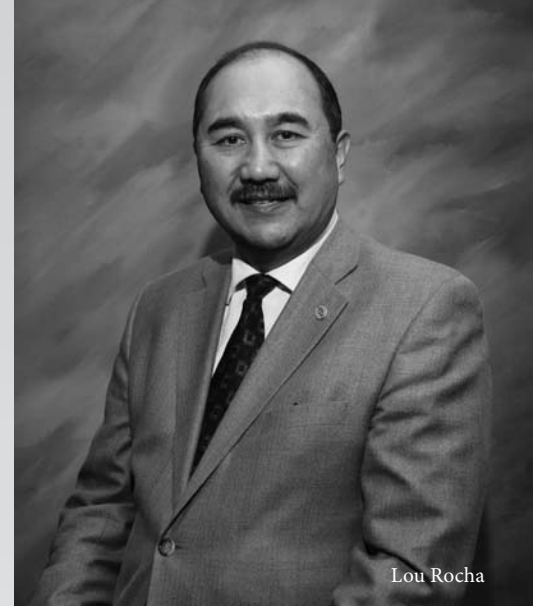


Reflections on CPCO

*...Built of hopes and dreams and visions
Rock of faith and vault of grace
Here the love of Christ shall end division
All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*



Lou Rocha

Marty Haugen's invitational lyrics perfectly describe the culture of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. CPCO is a place where all are welcome to build their hopes, dreams and visions on the rock of our faith. Ten years have passed since incorporation and throughout that time CPCO has been a place of welcome for members and friends alike. Our founding executive has reason to be proud of the evolution of CPCO and its standing in the Catholic education community.

Born out of the 1997 political protest, CPCO has emerged as an independent, professional association of principals and vice-principals in the Catholic school system in Ontario. Throughout those uncertain times from November 1997 to April 1998 CPCO received assistance from many quarters. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association provided office space and start-up funding to support the recruitment campaign to sign up the principals and vice-principals in Catholic schools. Despite solicitations from other emerging organizations, more than 1,500 Catholic school administrators had joined CPCO by the first general meeting on May 2, 1998. By June those numbers had surpassed 1,900 as CPCO received support from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association. Since 2000 the membership has been over 2,100 as more than 99 per cent of eligible members have joined CPCO. The founding executive, led by Jim Byrne and Ernie Seguin, could not have dreamed that CPCO would acquire and maintain such a strong membership base for ten years.

The key to CPCO's success has been the engagement of its members in their professional association. Since its inception, the CPCO executive council has developed ways for members to become involved in the work of the organization. There are opportunities for members to serve on the executive council, the standing committees and as representatives to other organizations. The professional development initiatives have created opportunities for members to be project leaders and instructors. The communications activities have invited participation through surveys, focus groups and written articles. All of these roles and activities have followed an approach based on communication, consultation, collaboration, consensus and commitment. The sum of these efforts has supported

the mandate of the organization to be an advocate for the members and for Catholic education.

As a non-profit organization of voluntary members, CPCO has always understood the need to provide relevant and valuable services for its membership. These services are both visible and invisible. The visible services include the legal benefit plan, communications and professional learning, group benefit plans and affinity programs, employment seminars and contract support. The invisible services are the advocacy that CPCO undertakes through meetings with politicians and the Ministry of Education, through survey data and position papers, and through the development of partnerships with other Catholic organizations and business associates.

The critical link between achieving the mandate and delivering the services is the staff at the CPCO office in Toronto. From the original staff in 1998 consisting of a president, executive director and secretary, CPCO has grown to a complement of ten full-time and six part-time employees. The staff matches the output of larger organizations because of their commitment to quality and service. The staff is the glue that binds the framework established by the executive council on behalf of the members. To ensure future services the executive council has created a succession plan for the academic staff positions. There will also be a review of the secondment model and the pension status of the organization in light of the future staffing needs of the organization.

There are many personal memories from my ten years at CPCO; two as a councillor and eight as executive director. The two years after incorporation (1998-2000) were marked by an earnest attempt to provide value for the hard-earned dollars that members contributed through their fees. Much work was done through voluntary service such as having retired principals insert 2,000 newsletters into envelopes for each issue. The first CPCO website was created and maintained in a home basement office. Executive meetings ran Friday evenings through Sunday morning, often ending in the celebration of Mass together. The issues of those early days were very labour-oriented and CPCO

members overcame many obstacles to ensure that the voice of Catholic leaders was heard at Ministry tables. The dozens of men and women who served on the executive council have given hundreds of hours away from friends and family for the good of their colleagues. They have demonstrated the true spirit of servant leadership and they are truly deserving of the members' appreciation.

The summer of 1999 saw the development of the Principal's Qualification Program in Ottawa in conjunction with the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and the association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO). In the fall of 1999 the Ministry of Education and the principals' councils co-hosted a Leadership Symposium, which culminated in two major statements about professional development and time management issues. These are still key issues ten years later.

Throughout its history CPCO members have consistently valued the Legal Benefit Plan (LBP) above all other services. Originally designed to assist in employment disputes, the LBP trends have shifted towards other issues such as complaints to the Ontario College of Teachers and parental harassment. The LBP has adapted and grown to meet members' needs. Although the service is costly, the improvements and extended coverage have been necessary to address the changing demands on administrators. The LBP has been well administered by STERLON for the benefit of our members. Similarly the Group Benefits Plan (GBP) through Johnson Inc. has provided excellent value to more than half of the members who have chosen it over their board plans. While premium savings have been achieved in most instances, the GBP incorporates a high level of member advocacy through collaborative efforts with the staff at Johnson Inc. The GBP has also added other programs such as Home and Auto, Critical Illness and Medoc Travel.

Professional development has become a major service in CPCO. By 2001 CPCO had developed its Catholic PQP which was later endorsed by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and supported by the Catholic directors of education. Over 1,000 Catholic teachers have now graduated from the CPCO PQP. In 2002 CPCO received its first Ministry grants to develop and deliver professional training programs for its members. The Professional Learning Fund for Administrators financed the development of more than 30 workshops that were offered to help CPCO members to acquire 14 credits under the infamous Professional Learning Program (PLP) requirement. The Liberals won the 2003 election and the PLP was repealed. The attention turned to the principal as instructional leader and CPCO produced two position papers in 2004 on the role of the principal. In December 2005 Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy delivered his paper on school leadership which contained 22 initiatives to support principals and vice-principals. Most of the initiatives are completed or in progress as 2008 ends.

CPCO was at the forefront of two major government initiatives in 2005 and 2006. In April 2005 the principals' councils launched the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat under the leadership of Dr. Avis Glaze. The launch was supported by the first of four

annual grants for the Leading Student Achievement (LSA) project that helped local members form professional learning teams. The excellent work of the LSA project led to other major grants for Shaping Safer Catholic Schools (2006), and Mentoring and Coaching (2007). With the benefit of these funding grants, CPCO was able to deliver free, high quality workshops in every Catholic school board during the last four years.

In February 2006 CPCO was given a \$4 million grant to help start the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL). This was another initiative from Gerard Kennedy's vision to develop school leadership. The IEL conducted two symposia in 2006 and funded three exchange programs in 2007 including the Catholic Leaders Research Project in Australia (July 2007). Most recently the IEL has commissioned The Learning Partnership to review succession planning in Ontario school boards. The IEL has operated successfully with tri-level management practices that should become the standard for all boards. CPCO staff members have been significant contributors to all of the IEL committees and the steering committee.

CPCO is renowned for its communications systems. CPCO's quarterly magazine, *Principal Connections*, received the Award of Distinction from the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education in October 2008. The weekly newsletter, *Catholic Principals' Connection* has been streamlined again to provide timely information to the members through e-mail. The online survey system has provided critical data for position papers and course evaluations plus a myriad of other purposes. The survey service was recently expanded to help local contract teams to prioritize bargaining goals. A communications audit (2007) by specialist Frank Emmerson concluded that CPCO was providing an exemplary service to its members. More importantly, CPCO members have stated that the communications have given them a sense of community to counter an increasing sense of isolation in their roles.

CPCO is entering its second decade as an independent, professional association and the torch is passing from the first cohort to the next generation. Almost 900 members have retired since those turbulent days of 1998 while more than 500 people have joined CPCO in the last three years. The issues and responsibilities are becoming more complex and onerous for those who have the courage to lead our Catholic schools. Work life balance has become a major consideration for those who are considering the leader's role. Our new administrators are facing their own turbulence but, despite these challenges, they are committed to taking their turn to protect our system. Their leadership will be important to the future of CPCO and to Catholic education itself. I am confident that the next generation will continue our 160-year tradition of excellence in Ontario.

Lou Rocha retired from CPCO in October 2008 to become Project Manager for "Friends and Advocates for Catholic Education" – a joint venture of the Ontario Catholic partner organizations to promote and protect the publicly-funded Catholic education system. His e-mail address is lrocha@ocsta.on.ca.