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Final Thoughts...Final Prayers

*Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.
Keep interested in your own career, however humble,
It is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.*

~ Desiderata

On January 1, 2010, Clara Pitoscia will assume the mantle of executive director of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. After almost 33 years, I find it appropriate that it is my work at CPCO, that will mark the final chapter of my journey as an educator. This reality combined with the myriad of emotions associated with the imminent arrival of the Christmas season gives me some pause and I ask your indulgence as I share some of those reflections.

*God of flowers touched with frost
and windows wearing white designs,
may your love keep our hearts from
growing cold in the empty seasons.*

~ Prayer for Autumn Days, Joyce Rupp

A few years ago at a family reunion, a cousin approached and commented, "You know, we always thought that you would be the first doctor in our family." While many responses came to mind, the words that left my lips were simply, "Thanks, but I've been able to do so much more." You see, I have survived open concept classrooms, the fight for full-funding for Catholic schools, Rae days, the transition of teachers to union status, Bill 160 and the Harris years, the birth of CPCO, the ongoing struggle to define the role of principals and vice-principals, the erosion of management rights and the occasional empty promise. Yet, one constant has remained throughout. I have loved being a teacher, a learner and a leader. Despite the numerous academic attempts to define good schools, great teachers and effective leaders, I would contend that we must not lose sight of the elemental reality that it is the passion for what we do that creates the moments of greatness that, in concert with one another, foster learning and strength of conviction.

*Everyone wants to participate in decisions
that affect them;
fewer and fewer people will accept decisions
dictated by someone else.*

~ Getting to Yes, Roger Fisher, William Ury & Bruce Patton

It strikes me that I have spent an inordinate amount of time throughout my career involved in negotiations of some kind or another. Unions and professional associations play an important role in society and in our schools. It has always been my view, however, that collective

agreements and personal service contracts were meant as a foundation from which to build, rather than an end game. The terms and conditions contained therein rightly set limits to our jobs, but should never limit our vocation and certainly not suppress our passion. While I accept the dictum that we must care for ourselves before we can maintain the energy and focus needed to care for others, I trust that the majority of teachers and administrators will continue to place the learning and well-being of the students they serve above the all too often narrow interpretations of contracts of employment.

I have no answers only convictions.

~ Sr. Joan Cronin

In the October 2009 issue of *Catholic Update*, Elizabeth Bookser Barkley, in an article entitled, *Catholic Schools - I'd Choose Them Again*, writes that the two forces that shaped her personal, moral and intellectual growth were her family and Catholic schools. Indeed, the virtues that we instil in our students, and dare I suggest in ourselves, nurture convictions integral to faith formation. I am proud of the sense of social justice and stewardship exhibited by so many students and adult members of our Catholic school communities. I take great solace from the fact that, at the end of the day, we can look to these shared values, virtues and convictions to overcome any differences that exist between us. While the search for answers may be self-fulfilling, it is our convictions that fill others.

*The function of leadership is to produce more leaders,
not more followers.*

~ Ralph Nader

Perhaps as a final thought, I would note that it is challenging for any leader to accept the reality that when they leave, if they have been truly effective, their absence will go largely unnoticed. It is somewhat with tongue-in-cheek that I note the success that so many people seemed to have enjoyed in my wake.

I am grateful that circumstances are such that I am retiring at Christmas. It has always been my favourite time of year and I value the opportunity that Christmas brings to reconnect with family and friends. When I am asked what I plan to do in retirement, my response has been simply, "I'm going home." To you, my CPCO family, I offer this prayer.

*May the Spirit of Christmas bring you peace,
The gladness of Christmas give you hope,
The warmth of Christmas grant you love.*

~ Author Unknown