



**WALKING EACH OTHER HOME:
A PATHWAY FOR FAITH FORMATION FOR STAFF**



THE HEART OF THE MATTER WE ARE CALLED...

Our Catholic schools strive to live out a distinctive mission. We are called to be a Catholic education community that understands and aspires to contribute to the faith formation and success of students, each other, and the community. It is a journey we take together as one body caring for one another.

"The Lord's invitation to encounter Him is made to each of you, in whatever place or situation you find yourself."
— Pope Francis

Our vision for the future requires an intentional, sustained focus on enriching and authentic staff formation from induction to leadership. The reimagining of formation builds upon the good work already in

place across our Catholic community. It requires that we thoughtfully consider the experiences we will foster to ensure that a strong, positive Catholic identity is evident in the ethos of our community and to what we will give our greatest energy and resources. Catholic leadership is about an influencing relationship, a collaborative process, that nurtures faith, spirituality, and culture throughout the community.

The professional and vocational development of all staff in serving our Catholic schools needs to be incorporated into board strategic and pastoral plans. This is essential to inviting deeper engagement, responding to current challenges, and shaping a genuine and compelling Catholic identity in our present time and for our future. It is a practical and necessary element of our shared work to fulfill our mission as Catholic schools. Most importantly, this is an expression of our Christian commitment to accompany one another on the journey as followers of Jesus as we undertake our mission to be a difference in the world.

"Careful attention must be given to support the formation of leaders. Our new leaders desire open dialogue in an adult learning model with trained theological and pastoral staff, both lay and religious. Catholic school boards are encouraged to support processes for faith formation for emerging leaders, and to approach this important task in ways that are comprehensive, systematic, thoughtful, intentional, and well-resourced." (*Renewing the Promise*, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario)

WHY FAITH FORMATION? CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Every person and each community has a story. By sharing stories we encounter the other and form relationships that create the space for transformation, and it is in this way that we make meaning in our lives.

Structured opportunities to share individual experiences and personal stories allow wisdom to emerge from the common experiences of the community. Experiences that have enlivened and sustained the spiritual needs of individuals as well as stories that have been sources of pain, disappointment and alienation can be a source of insight into possibilities and create a pathway that allows us to respond to this important work with courage, faith and hope.



MY STORY

The authentic work of adult faith formation begins with a recognition that the person is at the centre of the process. It is critical to recognize that all who work in our Catholic schools come to the process of formation with a personal story, experienced as a journey and shaped by their unique life experiences. This personal story reflects the integral spirituality of the individual. The process of formation, beginning with the person's story, affirms the importance of personal engagement by extending the invitation to the individual to commit to a journey that deepens understanding and knowledge of their own story.

OUR STORY

Individual stories are lived out within a communal context. The individual experience reflected in 'my story' rests within the larger narrative of 'our story,' a dimension of the pathway that emphasizes mutual engagement within an accompanying community. Individuals growing through formation come to understand and appreciate the importance of a communal story and experience something larger than themselves, whether it be the broader school and Church community, or the founding tradition to which they belong. Grounding the formation process in a shared experience, deepens the understanding of the ways in which they both shape and influence the communal story just as it shapes individuals.

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The pathway for faith formation is theologically rooted in three overarching goals:

- Relationship with Jesus
- Affiliation with the faith community
- Participation in the mission of the Church

(Jane Regan, *Forming a Community of Faith*)

THE STORY

'My story' and 'our story' are situated ultimately within 'the story' of salvation history. This element of the pathway opens the door to transformative engagement as individuals journey towards an awareness and deeper appreciation of the meta story of God, the creator who loved us into existence, and whose extraordinary presence is revealed to us through scripture, through our lives, and through all creation. Our human vocation calls us to live life fully through the realization that our lives have purpose beyond ourselves and our immediate needs. Our Christian faith tradition reminds us of the importance of community: the place where we pray with one another, learn from one another, and serve with one another so that the love God has for each of us is experienced in tangible ways. The saving mission of the Church is lived out not in isolation but is realized in and for the world. This formation process is dynamic and ongoing as 'lifelong learners' come to experience a reciprocity of love with God, the 'lifelong creator.'

Staff are an integral part of creating the ethos that speaks to God's presence in the life of the school. The role of the educator in helping our students achieve the Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations is to nurture the ability of students to integrate their learning and meaning making of one's values and beliefs with one's behaviour in daily life.

Our Catholic schools continue to function in a secular society and serve the needs of people who come from a variety of experiences. This is complex to navigate, and so we need to ensure that we support our staff in developing their ability to cultivate the integration between faith and life. For authentic, meaningful faith formation to take place, there is also a responsibility on the part of staff to engage in the process and to continue to seek opportunities for on-going formation throughout their vocation.

Authentic faith formation is centered in Christ, with the knowledge and understanding that we journey to God accompanied by others. A living theology is expressed through new ways of seeing and being.

FORMATION COMES TO LIFE

PRINCIPLES OF IMPLEMENTATION

All educators and staff who work in Catholic education are understood to be involved in a life-long learning journey. Learning happens in a variety of contexts in their lives, personal and professional, and is a continuing process of discovery, understanding, meaning making and integration.

Formation is individual and communal. Ideally it is integrated into the *Strategic Plan of the Board*, individual schools, and the daily life and vibrancy of the community.

The importance of sustained, engaged and critical spiritual conversations:

- Enhances our ability to express our faith.
- Gives us the opportunity to come to clarity about what we think and believe.
- Provides a context for seeing connection between faith and life.
- Strengthens our faith as we hear about the faith of others.

(Jane Regan, *Forming a Community of Faith*)

GOOD FAITH FORMATION INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES

■ INVITATIONAL

Good faith formation provides an inviting and safe space, characterized by trust and the creation of a culture of belonging for all participants.

This principle is important for personal transformation to happen. This allows participants to feel safe enough to be vulnerable, to dialogue, to explore questions, and to process feelings.

■ RESPONSIVE

Good faith formation pays attention to the stories of people’s lives and is responsive to those experiences and needs through a process of accompaniment.

This principle is important because we serve a diverse group of individuals from induction to leadership. The formation journey is as unique as we are as individuals and therefore it must be attentive to the diversity of participants.

■ CONTEMPLATIVE

Good faith formation provides a variety of opportunities for personal reflection, a diversity of experiences of ritual and a wide range of contemplative practices that lead to deeper engagement in formation.

This principle is important because self-awareness and engagement is a critical step in personal transformation.

■ EXPERIENTIAL

Good faith formation promotes a call to service.

This principle is important because it encourages participants to reflect upon their gifts, talents, passions and relationships to develop a deeper awareness of their personal vocation and to be the heart and hands of Christ in the world.

■ SACRAMENTAL

Good faith formation draws participants into deeper relationship with God and the faith community. It is an expression of our Baptismal call to live a spiritual life in the present time.

This principle is important because participants are opened to the awareness and recognition of God’s grace and respond in a deeper way to the call to discipleship.

■ INCREMENTAL

Good faith formation is incremental and requires a commitment of dedicated time, over a period of time.

This principle is important because scaffolded experiences over time cultivate presence and growth that helps individuals to respond to the invitation for on-going formation.

■ TRANSFORMATIONAL

Good faith formation recognizes that growth and transformation are distinct from the transfer of information.

This principle is important because information can be presented at given points in time, however transformation will have its own rhythm and sustained process. Such rhythms and processes will be affected by the individuals themselves and by the dynamics in the group. The process ignites a desire to seek out additional opportunities to deepen transformation.





TRANSFORMATION OUTCOMES

AN INNER JOURNEY OUTWARDLY EXPRESSED

"The fundamental focus of adult religious education is not remedial; it is not about instructing adults in propositions of the tradition that they did not receive or have forgotten from their last experiences of formal religious education. In other dimensions of their lives, adults gain the information they need to function effectively: how to use a computer, how to negotiate the best interest rate for a home loan, how to read a quarterly retirement statement. The same is true of faith and church membership. But the information is not enough; it is not information for its own sake, but information that is in service of formation and transformation."
(Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*)

In the ministry we embrace, in the work we do, in who we are, formation is about growing the transformative vocation of the Catholic educator and leader. It may include some or all of the following outcomes.

Participants will:

- Experience faith as personal and communal.
- Develop openness to growing faith.
- Recognize that their own life is filled with encounters with God.
- Acknowledge their life experience so that they see the grace in their lives and recognize how their gifts build community within their own families, locally in their community and the life of the church.
- Be encouraged to engage in an ongoing interior spiritual prayer life.
- Engage in the dialogue between faith and culture.
- Develop a deepening sense of the value of and engagement in the Catholic tradition.

- Acquire knowledge of the faith as needed which allows the participants to more effectively make connections in practical ways to their lived experience.
- Be invited to ask questions of deeper meaning in their lives and their faith.
- Confront the challenges that are an inevitable part of spiritual growth and discern how they are called to live.
- Critically reflect on the meaning, value and significance of their Baptismal call and the link to social justice.
- Be inspired to make a commitment to their ongoing journey of faith formation.

Because our faith has a communal expression, the growth of the individual impacts the community. An essential component of the faith formation pathway is the core capacities that are fostered through engagement in formation. These capacities are the hallmarks of Christian community.



THE HALLMARKS OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

- **PRESENCE** reflects an incarnational understanding of the world that God is among us, in the world and in the moment.
- **PRAYER** reflects a personal prayer life, the plank upon which is built the day to day witness to God's presence.
- **PRINCIPLE** is centered on walking the talk of Jesus' vision living the values of the Gospel.
- **WELCOME** reflects the inclusiveness and hospitality of Jesus that we extend to all.
- **RITUAL** reflects a sacramental understanding of life and a reverence for all creation. It also points to the rich liturgical tradition of the Church.
- **JOURNEY** reflects that as a Church we are the people of God journeying together.
- **PURPOSE** reflects a deep understanding of vocation and a clear sense of what the work of Catholic education is about.
- **COMMITMENT** reflects a passion for making a difference through one's vocation and witness.
- **FIDELITY** reflects a faithful stewardship of the best of Catholic, Christian education tradition and gratitude for those with whom the journey is shared.

ASSESSING IMPACT HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?

Considerations for Program Assessment and Reflections for Faith Formation Programs

Formation is a shared responsibility that occurs both within and beyond our educational communities. Assessing faith formation programs can be difficult; however, it is critical to ensure that the programs are moving us forward to actualizing the hopes in *Renewing the Promise*.

Our culture wants us to quantify and use numeric metrics in these assessments. More appropriately, movement i.e., transformation, is the positive measure. In other words, what core capacities will the members of the community demonstrate individually and collectively?

While we are not assessing the individual's faith, we are assessing the effectiveness of the programs for which we hold responsibility, against the intended outcomes.

Program assessment includes the effective collection, analysis and use of a variety of data to determine and evaluate outcomes.



Data sources may include such things as: the type and number of program offerings; system-wide events and opportunities for spiritual and theological formation; participant metrics including targeted audiences and number of participants; resources and personnel to enrich staff formation; self-evaluation; photographs, videos; interviews; and Board and School Improvement Plan faith formation goals.

Consideration should be given to present the system goals for staff formation at board meetings and/or incorporate them into the *Board Strategic Plan* and the *Director's Annual Report* including the supports, resources and personnel to enrich staff formation. Infographics incorporating pictures, words and metrics are a useful strategy to capture a variety of data for assessment and reporting.

"The assessment of people's faith should not be oversimplified as the spiritual side of human nature is extremely complex and multi-dimensional." (David Moberg, *Assessing and Measuring Spirituality*)

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