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## WALKING EACH OTHER HOME

### STRENGTHENING THE SOUL OF LEADERSHIP IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

by TAMARA NUGENT and  
MICHAEL PAUTLER



“On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.” (Psalm 138:3)

Leadership in Catholic education is experiencing significant change and as a result, the related work of adult faith and spiritual formation requires review and renewal. In order to maintain the distinctive character of Catholic schools it is essential for ‘lay’ educators to protect, promote and model authentic Catholic leadership. Simultaneously there is a “growing understanding of the adult developmental journey; and the shifts in both understanding and practice around spiritual formation.”<sup>i</sup> (Gowdie, p. 91). In *Stirring the Soul of Catholic Education*, Dr. Jill Gowdie summarizes the implications of this current context:

“The coalescence of these changes has overwhelmed traditional assumptions about appropriate spiritual formation, with the uniqueness of the individual journey now being heavily influenced by cultural context and key relationships.”<sup>ii</sup> (Gowdie, p. 91)

She asserts that research and experience has prepared Catholic educators “to explore new ways of formation that address both new contexts (post modern culture) and renewed purpose (personal transformation).”<sup>iii</sup> (Gowdie, p. 91)

Catholics believe that to be human is to be made in God’s image and likeness, and that we are destined to return to the creator God who loved us into being.



**Our human vocation is to be companions on a journey, ‘walking each other home.’**

While true in every aspect of life, this worldview is even more explicitly an expectation within the context of faith communities.



**Those entrusted with responsibility for Catholic schools have a particular obligation to strengthen the soul of leadership in Catholic education and can do so by taking up the challenge to create innovative formation pathways, guiding and accompanying all members of the community towards greater maturity in faith.**

Such opportunities should be thoughtfully developed and made widely available to support personalized faith formation opportunities for all community members across all areas of the organization, and most especially for those who serve in leadership roles.

#### VALUES, ATTITUDES AND A PASTORAL PATHWAY

Author and facilitator Tom Zanzig, who specializes in adult faith formation, outlines several values, attitudes, and pastoral principles that need to be embraced in order to minister effectively to and with adults to augment a pathway for formation. The following principles, drawn from this work, have been modified and adapted to the Ontario context.<sup>iv</sup>

- Catholic educators work and minister within a community of faith, comprised of individuals, uniquely called to serve in this time and in this place. Recognition of the gift and responsibility for publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario must be embedded in the work.
- As a community, Catholic educators nurture and support one another to fulfill the shared mission of the Church, live the Gospel message, and develop Ontario Catholic School Graduates.



- Each member of a Catholic education community is engaged in a lifelong journey of faith formation that is not limited to nor solely dependent on affiliation with a parish.
- Understanding and appreciating this compels Catholic school boards to invite, challenge, and equip adults within the community to assume personal responsibility for their spiritual formation and growth in the shared mission of the Church with the support of the community.
- This implicitly suggests an obligation for school boards to remain open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, resisting the temptation of exclusionary policies and practices or overly simplistic solutions.
- In order to most effectively build upon the enduring gift of Catholic education, all who share in its gospel mission must be invited to use their God-given strengths to share the Good News, for the common good.
- This in turn requires that Catholic school boards provide a warm, welcoming, witnessing environment that includes pastoral care for all.

Soul work and the spiritual life is a process intended to change our lives and not a program.<sup>v</sup> The invitation is to remain committed to our shared purpose and open to the transformative experiences that the Spirit is creating among and through us.

## CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

According to Jane Regan, a professor at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, the pathway to faith formation is theologically rooted in three overarching goals:

- Relationship with Jesus
- Affiliation with the faith community
- Participation in the mission of the Church<sup>vi</sup>

Zanzig proposes that at its heart, effective adult faith formation, is spiritual transformation and supports the idea that a spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation is theologically grounded and provides an “accessible understanding of the spiritual life and the dynamics of lifelong spiritual transformation.”<sup>vii</sup> (Zanzig, p. 6)

**“Transformation entails meaningful, deep change within individuals as they experience the Holy and as they mature in their experience of, and expression given to their faith.”<sup>viii</sup>**

The common insight shared by Regan and Zanzig is the need to find ways to be open to this process of transformation and create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take

place. The journey of transformation requires some measure of willingness to relinquish control and all those facilitating such a journey must be able to give themselves over to a process that cannot be fully understood, nor can the outcome be fully predicted. It is the same process of transformation to which Paul refers to in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind.” It is in fact, to believe wholeheartedly that there is something God-ordained at work.<sup>ix</sup>

## RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Much has been written about the distinction between religion and spirituality. Dr. Jill Gowdie who is well known for her work in spirituality, leadership, and Catholic education, acknowledges the interplay and complexity of both constructs. “The term ‘religion’ implies a sense of belonging to an organized faith tradition and the term ‘spirituality’ denotes a more personal connection with something greater than oneself, including the sacred.” (Gowdie, p.59) Dr. Gowdie maintains that, “This latter area of exploration — the connection and articulation of the Sacred — must be our starting point within the broader frame of spiritual formation in the Catholic faith tradition. When a spiritual knowing is activated for learners of any age, religion may then offer the spirit ‘a complex language, a sense of tradition and a cultural memory’.”<sup>x</sup> (Gowdie, p. 59)

(Quoting Grace, 2012) Gowdie continues, “In Catholic Christian terms, spirituality may be further defined as ‘the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ and the saints, through the indwelling of the Spirit and lived within the Church and community of believers’. Thus, spiritual formation is the growth of the whole person through intentional focus on particular perspectives, practices and relationships that reflect and nurture this way of being.”<sup>xi</sup> (Gowdie p. 62)

In contemporary discourse the assertion that someone is spiritual, but not religious, is increasingly common, most especially among younger generations. Such expression seems to present personal spirituality as an alternative, distinct from organized religion, rather than as an integral aspect of human identity and a complementary pathway that nurtures the inherent human capacity for God.

To be human is to grapple with life’s big questions: Who am I? What do I want to give myself to? What is my purpose? What is the meaning of life? Thinking about what it means to be a person in communion with God, oneself and the world is natural, and religion and spirituality are the two foundational pathways to discover truth and wrestle with

such soul questions. Both are valid and there is a relationship and interplay between the two. A traditional approach that preserves the essence of Catholic teaching and tradition, and an evolutionary approach that empowers spiritual growth and change as individuals, societies, and the world evolve, are equally necessary.

**“ 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. Opportunities that encourage both an awareness and openness to personal spirituality and learning that builds knowledge, literacy and familiarity with the Catholic faith tradition are both appropriately a part of this holistic learning journey.**

While humans have an innate yearning for relationship with God, the ability to recognize a holy longing within may or may not be part of conscious awareness, and not everyone finds that traditional forms of institutional belonging support, deepen or sustain their spiritual life. However, a growing recognition of a spiritual dimension renews the ever-present invitation to enter into relationship with God.

Formation is both individual and communal and is most likely to be effective when supported thoughtfully and with intention. Within the realm of Catholic education, ideally there is strategic alignment of goals and priorities related to faith formation, in a manner consistent with the way in which goals and priorities are established for instructional improvement, operational efficacy or strategic priorities. These are documented in multi-year strategic plans, board plans, and pastoral plans and animated through the daily life and vibrancy of the community.

## RESEARCH

The renewal of adult faith formation that incorporates viable, integrated pathways, is essential.

**“ Research points to the fact that that the religious identity and spiritual life of adults has experienced a dramatic shift. This reality presents a compelling pastoral challenge for faith communities and those who serve in Catholic education.**

Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest, and spiritual writer, offers this insight: “Our inability to recognize and love God in what is right in front of us has allowed us to separate religion from our actual lives. There is Sunday morning and there is real life.”<sup>xii</sup> Catholic educators need to pay attention to the generational dispositions toward the Catholic Church and Catholic schools

and leverage this research and data to inform an agenda for adult faith formation today and in the future.

The trends within the Post Vatican II generations of Catholics are clear and urgent. For many young adults, Catholic identity is weak, focused outside the institutional church, and only moderately central to their lives. The implications are significant. It appears that there is a linear trend away from conventional religious practices, with the youngest Catholics being the least inclined to maintain traditional faith practices. Pope Francis also acknowledges this fact: “It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition.”<sup>xiii</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)

The authors of *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*, highlight several related observations and challenges:

- Catholics are more likely to distinguish between teachings they consider core (and tend to accept) and ones they view as peripheral (and tend to disagree with).
- An uncoupling of faith and Church life whereby Catholics are more likely to identify with the faith than the institutional Church and Catholicism is less a matter of core identity and more a matter of personal option and more individualistic, especially in the Post Vatican II generations.
- Catholics, especially young adults are less attached to the Church and less likely to participate in the sacraments and traditional devotional practices.
- Religious and faith literacy is a problem across all generations but especially among post Vatican II generations. While young adults like being Catholic, they are not sure what is distinctive about Catholicism, what Catholic heritage means, and what is Catholicism’s core narratives.<sup>xiv</sup>

*Canada’s Catholics: Vitality and Hope in a New Era* reinforces the above findings noting that 80% of Canadians who were raised in Catholic homes continue to identify themselves as Catholic, even though a significant majority show little interest in active participation or practice.<sup>xv</sup> So while there is a persistent sense of being Catholic there are declining levels of religious practice and behavioural involvement amongst young Catholics with increasing numbers of individuals who identify as “spiritual but not religious”.<sup>xvi</sup> (PEW Research).

The trends presented in the research may seem discouraging, however this information is necessary to understand what has changed and to critically assess why things have shifted. Catholic educators are highly skilled at using data to focus efforts on making necessary adjustments as a response to contrary indicators. Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan, a theologian and scholar of spirituality, maintains,



“That so many young adults continue to recognize a spiritual dimension in their lives is a hopeful sign that they are also seeking the language and frameworks that religious traditions can provide.”<sup>xvii</sup>

What are the implications for actual faith formation and leadership programming in Catholic education from induction to leadership? Horan points towards a potential answer by suggesting the need to challenge foundational assumptions.

**“What if our starting point in thinking about what it means to be a person in communion with God, oneself and the world was not reduced to external expressions of institutional belonging, but instead began with attention to humans’ inherent capacity for God?”<sup>xviii</sup> In practical terms, those responsible for the design and delivery of faith formation opportunities need to ground their work in two simple, yet fundamental questions: “Where do we meet them? and What do they need?”**

## REIMAGINE, INNOVATE, INVIGORATE

A reimagining of formation and an openness to innovation builds upon the good work already evident in Catholic educational communities. It begins with the thoughtful consideration of the experiences that might be offered and requires a commitment of the necessary time, energy, and resources to ensure that a strong, positive, Catholic identity is fostered within the ethos of the community.

The questions, “Where do we meet them?” and, “What do they need?” are integral to the process of planning with the end in mind. One example of such a faith formation and leadership development program experience was established as a joint initiative of Catholic educators, both laity and clergy, amongst the Catholic Partners in the Diocese of Hamilton. The partnership was formed to facilitate collaboration and to encourage innovative practices to address adult faith formation, which was identified as a common need amongst all the partners. This resulted in the development of the From Information to Transformation program experience. Indicators of early success and encouraging outcomes with this experience prompted a decision to endeavour to consolidate the learning through the articulation of guiding principles that might serve as a guide in the development more broadly of adult faith formation experiences. In order to understand the relevance, reach of the program, and obtain feedback on the implementation of the sessions, program facilitators collaborated with research and development services from one of the local Catholic school boards, using a process and outcome evaluation approach. While not structured as a formal research project, the evaluative approach was developed from

a logic model to be standardized and comprehensive, without being intrusive.

The results of the local research undertaken, both qualitative and quantitative, confirms that formation that is on-going, personalized, and occurs within community predictably leads to the following outcomes for participants:

- An enhanced ability to express faith;
- An opportunity and a process to come to greater clarity about personal thoughts and beliefs;
- A context for seeing connection between faith and life; and
- Strengthened faith through listening to faith experiences of others.

(Jane Regan, Forming a Community of Faith.)<sup>xix</sup>

Faith formation and leadership is invigorated in community and strengthened by well-thought out, well-articulated and well-resourced strategic pathways.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FAITH FORMATION

The learnings and insights that emerged from the local program offering resulted in the development of seven guiding principles. These principles are consistent with the literature on contemporary adult faith formation. The guiding principles enhance the predictive positive impact and the efficacy of formation experiences; they do not work in isolation. They are interrelated, and it is the organic nature of the interplay and importance of each that cultivates a transformative experience for participants. This is also consistent with the research.

### 1. 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 and aims to create the conditions for participants to feel safe enough to be vulnerable, to dialogue, to explore questions, and to process feelings.

It is understood that there is a communal expectation for on-going faith formation as a member of a Catholic education community. And while it is a reasonable vocational expectation for individuals, it is also incumbent upon systems to encourage, support and nurture formation by way of invitation and engagement with the community. This nudges individuals to grow and to contribute to the growth of the community.

Small group opportunities and mentors are particularly conducive to cultivating spiritual companionship, and the work of Parker Palmer on Circles of Trust is one example of

a set of practices that has been used with superior results in the From Information to Transformation program developed by the Hamilton Diocesan partners. Drawing extensively but not exclusively on the work of Palmer, mentor relationships and small group opportunities support the inner journey of each person in the group, ensuring each individual feels safe enough to show up and speak their truth and to help each person listen to his or her own inner teacher. This includes articulating the pains and struggles with the Church along with the hopes and actions that can be taken as part of their own role as church and as leaders.

Parker Palmer describes Circles of Trust as a space that invites the soul to show up, in other words, the core of self and selfhood. This practice of developing a Circle of Trust, establishes the ground rules for a safe space for individuals and groups to learn and grow together. Palmer identifies six characteristics that underly invitational, open, hospitable spaces that create the fertile soil for growth.

- **Create spaces that are open.** Participants are invited to slow down, listen and reflect in a quiet, focused space and engage in dialogue with others in the circle about things that matter. It is a sorting and sifting to clarify truth for oneself in the company of others and enables that truth to ripple out into aspects of work and lives.
- **Commit to no fixing, saving, advising or correcting.** This is vital to welcoming the soul and to making space for the inner teacher. This freedom from external judgement enables individuals to speak one's truth in a trusting community, to have honest conversation, and to learn to check and correct from within.
- **Ask open, honest questions.** This invites deep listening and helps others to listen to their inner teacher, providing important learning and growth for all.
- **Explore the intersection of the universal stories of human experience with the personal stories of our lives.** These guided conversations may focus on scripture, a poem, a teaching story, music or work of art, drawn from diverse cultures and wisdom traditions so that each person can interact with and explore them in their own way.
- **Use multiple modes of reflection so everyone can find their place and pace.** Multiple modes of reflection, encourage both speaking and listening, large group and small groups, journaling, music, movement, the educative power of silence and the healing power of laughter. All are woven into a tapestry of truth creating a closely knit group in which everyone can find a place that both affirms and stretches them.

- **Honour and observe confidentiality.** Participants understand and respect that nothing said in these circles will be revealed outside the circle and that things said by participants will not be pursued or passed on to others without explicit permission.<sup>xx</sup>

Circles of Trust are in essence a working covenant. Each individual is responsible for their part in the shared life of the whole community. The leader's role is to create an environment that fosters growth and encouragement. It is important that participants can share honestly those areas in which transformation is necessary.

“Managing deep issues of personal growth is made possible only in a community in which individuals feel genuinely known by others, feel safe, and believe that others have their best interests at heart. Leaders must both model and cultivate this climate.

## 2. 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 school board programs and initiatives serve a diverse group of individuals from induction to leadership. The formation journey is as unique as each individual and therefore formation opportunities must be attentive to the diversity of participants. To experience intimate community, it is necessary to be able to reveal oneself to others; to honestly, freely, and thoughtfully tell and process life stories. In the counsel of others who genuinely care, there can be greater wisdom.

According to Jane Regan, “adults learn best when they gather in conversation around things that matter.” It is imperative to connect meaningfully to the lived experiences of the adults that comprise the community and who are in search of accompaniment, without exception, and without judgement. In authentic communities of accompaniment, the underlying understanding is “here comes everybody.”<sup>xxi</sup> This includes 2SLGBTQIA+, nones, those who are divorced, grieving, experiencing mental illness, doubting, fallen away, seeking, along with saints and sinners, to name but a few.

An effective approach to faith formation begins with the individual, accepts and honours their lived experience, and is responsive to their evolving needs and capacity for transformational growth. Just like all good teaching, it is built around the learner. Personalization provides individuals an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth.



As an example, in the From Information to Transformation program, the experience of community includes a 'graced history' exercise that has been tremendously effective in building community and enhancing self-understanding. Highlights of one's life story walks a person through the process of putting together a personal, creative presentation of the most formative relationships, events and experiences of their life. As people share their stories with each other, a deep level of trust and commitment grows.

Each individual brings with them to the community their own perspective and experience of the world. The goal is to facilitate connection with the sacred and connect meaningfully within the context of the individual's lived experience and vocational context.

The importance of learning to listen to and accompany others is a predominant theme in the writing of Pope Francis. The papal encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti (Brothers and Sisters All)*, invites us to see beyond differences and to work with differences to grow together and build a new and peaceful world.<sup>xxii</sup>

### 3. 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. To realize the need for transformation, it is necessary to have an understanding of self, both as an individual and as a member of the Body of Christ.

Each individual is shaped by past experience, and so contemplative formation programs must incorporate opportunities to explore and appreciate various aspects of personal identity. For instance, in the From Information to Transformation program, this is encouraged through the 'graced history' exercise, mentioned above, and understanding through personality types using the Enneagram.<sup>xxiii</sup> There are numerous tools and online inventories available to help individuals and organizations identify their strengths and open a pathway to self-discovery such as the Enneagram, StrengthsFinder 2.0, and Type Coach. The goal is not to analyze, criticize, or control each other, but it is to grow in self-awareness, and affirm what God is doing in and through one another.

The Center for Action and Contemplation, describes contemplation as "the practice of being fully present — in heart, mind, and body — to what is, in a way that allows

you to creatively respond and work toward what could be." Contemplative formation opportunities require time and space be created to prayerfully wrestle with the big questions and confer meaning on one's life and purpose. For example, a variety of prayer practices such as lectio divina, Christian meditation, centering prayer, Taizé, and the Ignatian Examen, journaling, time in nature, traditional rituals, and silence in solitude and in community, are contemplative practices that can be used to inspire meaning and deeper awareness of purpose. Such practices are both practical and transformative and may serve to develop individuals' capacity for focus and reflection amid the many distractions that are part of everyday life. "Only the contemplative mind can bring forward the new consciousness that is needed to awaken a more loving, just, and sustainable world."<sup>xxiv</sup> The love of God that leads to prayer and contemplation is the same love that leads to service to others.

### 4. 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. Catholic theology maintains a strong focus on social justice, the common good and community. Service learning and participation in social justice activities draws on the tradition of scripture, "...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

**“ The experience of pastoral accompaniment encourages participants “in a covenantal relationship with their God, the community, and the world. A covenant they express through carefully discerned personal, spiritual practices, communal connections, and Christian service.”<sup>xxv</sup> (p. 5. Zanzig, 2012)**

Corporal and spiritual works of mercy are a means to integrate prayer and action. They are a way of life that cares for and shows mercy towards others in all aspects of their identity, existence, and their need. Pope Francis notes,

“The Christian life involves the practice of the traditional seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy. We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, schools for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for those needing counsel and forgiveness... But if we look at the works

of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces.” – Pope Francis Message for the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September 2016.

Within a contemplative approach to formation, experiences such as feeding the homeless or volunteering at hospice can become a point of entry to engage with the teachings of the Church, invite deeper understanding, and prayerfully inspire service.

## 5. 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 are encouraged to respond in a deeper way to the call to discipleship. It is an opportunity for the re-introduction of some of the direct ‘church’ experience that is less commonly the touchstone for many of the generations currently serving in our school communities.

People come to faith and grow in faith and a life of faith through participation in the practices and rituals of the Christian community. Writing about the Sacramental Principle, Father Richard Rohr introduces the heart of sacramental theology, and maintains that our unique and ordinary circumstances are the very places where we meet the Universal Christ.

“Every resurrection story found in the Gospels affirms an ambiguous—yet certain—presence of the Risen Christ in very ordinary settings, like walking on the road to Emmaus with a stranger, roasting fish on the beach, or looking like a gardener to Mary Magdalene. These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God’s presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions. We Catholics call this a sacramental theology, where the visible and tactile are the primary doorway to the invisible. This is why each of the formal sacraments of the church insists on a material element like water, oil, bread, wine, the laying on of hands, or the physicality of marriage itself.

The sacramental principle is this: Begin with a concrete moment of encounter, based in this physical world, and the soul universalizes from there, so that what is true here becomes true everywhere else too. And so the spiritual journey proceeds with ever-greater circles of inclusion into

the One Holy Mystery! But it always starts with what many wisely call the ‘scandal of the particular.’ It is there that we must surrender, even if the object itself seems more than a bit unworthy of our awe, trust, or surrender. The purest form of spirituality is to find God in what is right in front of you—the ability to accept what the French Jesuit and mystic Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675–1751) called the sacrament of the present moment.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Mature disciples come to understand the church as living and working in the community. Rituals are important as they provide communities a way to celebrate and lament.

## 6. 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.

“Understanding and living out our Baptismal call is a life-long journey. Incremental faith formation experiences make the same assumptions about continuous growth and on-going support over time that serve as the foundation for the design of all serious efforts at professional learning.

Growth, whether personal or professional, is achieved through a sustained process rather than one-off events. As life-long learners, participants discover ways to cultivate solitude and silence, and to enter into service, worship, prayer, and study, together, over time. The design of a pathway guide is a helpful way to document formation experiences and time and activity for specific groups as they relate to long term goals for adult faith formation. Faith formation experiences that nurture and guide transformation inspire ongoing engagement towards mature discipleship.

## 7. 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.



“Thus, any approach to transformation that seeks to bring about real change must go beyond merely grasping information at the cognitive level to full knowledge that impacts our deepest inner orientations and trust structures, false-self patterns, and any obstacles that prevent us from fully surrendering to God. This kind of change involves clear teaching about the nature of the Christian life, concrete practices that help us internalize truth in ways that change how we respond in the world, and community that supports and catalyzes the process.”<sup>xxvii</sup> (p. 5. Zanzig, 2012)

There is a value to information, and Catholic school boards can and should provide opportunities for their staff to learn about the Catholic faith. However, transformative faith formation extends beyond information, and aspires to impact how people are living their learning.

## IT TAKES COURAGE

How can Catholic educators extrapolate and implement such a model for formation in order to provide personally, professionally, and spiritually enriching experiences from induction to leadership? What must Catholic schools and school systems offer to effectively accompany educators in a journey of faith formation and leadership development in this post-pandemic world? The creation and delivery of such programs, from vision through to implementation, requires a courageous commitment to formation for mission, and begins by initiating a review to assess the relevance and impact of current and long-standing practices, some effective and some not.

The intention is not to evaluate and judge an individual's faith, but rather to recognize that those who lead such efforts on behalf of Catholic school systems hold responsibility for assessing the impact and effectiveness of programs and experiences offered, against the intended outcomes. In addition to multiple data sources that can be derived from self evaluation, focus interviews, interim and final surveys, number and type of program experience offerings, photographs, videos, and so on, the following are some guiding questions that can help to assess impact, measure reaction, learning, change and results.

- Reaction: How do participants react to the program experience and what is the measure of their satisfaction?
- Learning: To what extent has learning occurred?
- Change: To what extent has behavior changed as a result of the program experience?
- Results: To what extent have the results occurred because of the impact of the program experience?

Innovation is a continuous and tenacious process. Leaders considering new ways of providing faith formation require very specific skills. It is one thing to be open to innovation but to discern, design, implement, assess, refine, expand, and sustain innovations requires highly developed skills best acquired and practiced within a professional network of practice and support. The essential component parts of such an approach to innovation resemble the synodal approach; listening, discerning, and planning together as a community with a shared mission that all Catholics have been encouraged to embrace:

“Within this context, synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute. At the same time, the decision to “journey together” is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

It takes courage and vulnerability to accept this invitation to walk toward a distant, sometimes fuzzy, future. It is not an easy undertaking. It requires a willingness to let go of personal ideas and preferences as well as a desire to be receptive to new manifestations of the presence of God in our time. But as Brené Brown observes, “Daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things”.<sup>xxix</sup>

Genuine accompaniment has the ‘hope’ of the ultimate destination and includes embracing uncertainty and being open to the signposts along the way. There is a particular letting go of control, and a genuine act of faith to recognize the Spirit will move through the work, but that is precisely the challenge that the Bishops of Ontario issued to Catholic leaders in their pastoral letter, *Renewing the Promise*:

“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.”<sup>xxx</sup> (*Renewing the Promise*, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario. p.25).

All those who serve in Catholic education are invited into co-responsibility for the Church's mission. High priority must be given to adult catechesis and the reimagining of faith formation; to find and fall in love with God in the midst of one's life and vocation, and to strengthen the soul of

leadership in Catholic education. Adult faith formation is highly contextual. The process of being continuously formed on the journey of walking each other home necessitates a renewed commitment to quality program experiences for all adults that draws on the research and experiences known to have a positive predictable impact. Sister Joan Chittister summarizes the current context and the call to action as follows: "We need a faith than can function in the present, not a religion that mirrors the past."<sup>xxxi</sup>

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCERNMENT

### Invitational

- Who are we inviting to adult faith formation experiences from induction through to leadership? Who are we missing?
- How do we create an environment of trust?

### Responsive

- Are our adult faith formation experiences tailored to the diversity of participants and our current context? How do we know?
- Do we have a well articulated formation or pathway guide plan that helps everyone understand the expectation, purpose, and goals of lifelong faith formation and how you are implementing and supporting them? Do they appear in a Pastoral Plan, a Strategic Plan, or Board Plan?
- Do we clearly articulate faith formation pathways for our staff to chart a path for faith growth toward a deeper relationship with Jesus and the life and practices of the Christian community?
- What structures exist for spiritual companionship and accompaniment?
- What investment is made in the training of leaders to be spiritual companions?

### Contemplative

- Do we understand and intentionally teach, model, and provide a wide range of contemplative practices?
- What opportunities are there to interpret together the Scriptures and history of the church's experience, particularly in relation to their meaning, for our own lives, our community and world?

### Experiential

- What experiential opportunities do we engage in as a community to carry out specific faithful acts of service and witness together?

### Sacramental

- How do we cultivate supportive, engaged communities?
- What opportunities do we create for worshipping together and receiving the sacraments?

### Incremental

- How do we scaffold and sustain adult faith formation opportunities over time, so they are not a 'one and done' event?
- How might we guide people in creating a faith growth plan over time with the experiences, programs, activities and resources that best match their faith formation needs?

### Transformational

- How do we measure the impact of our faith formation experiences?
- What opportunities exist to enhance current offerings or to innovate and create new initiatives that lead to growth and transformation?

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## ENDNOTES

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# NOTES



