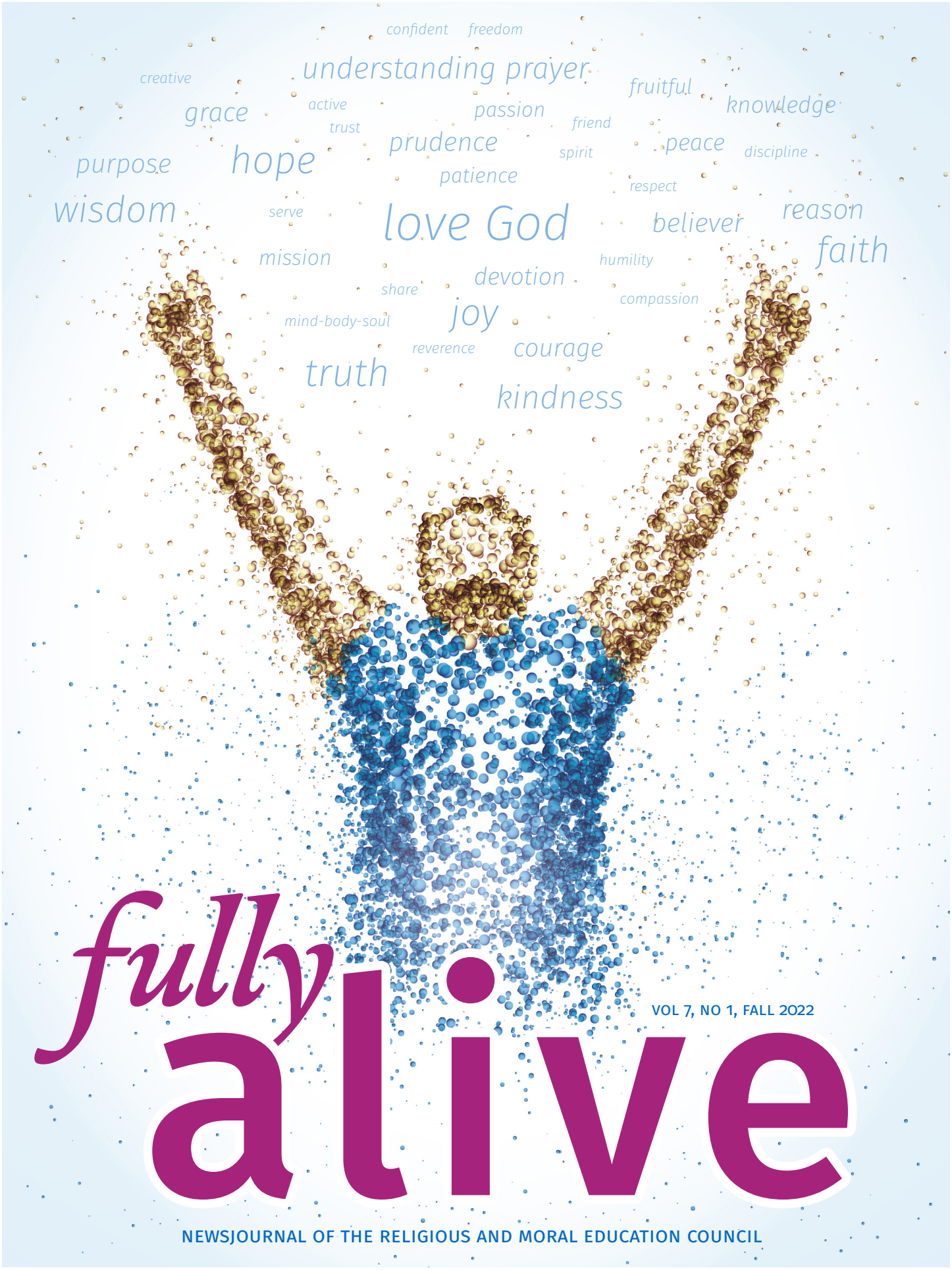

fully alive

VOL 7, NO 1, FALL 2022

NEWSJOURNAL OF THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

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Fully Alive *is the newsjournal of the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) of The Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1.* *Editorial and production services: Document Production staff, ATA. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the RMEC or the ATA. Address manuscripts and correspondence concerning this publication to Elaine Willette-Larsen at amberzeroone@gmail.com. ISSN 2560-6093*

Individual copies of this newsjournal can be ordered at the following prices: 1 to 4 copies, $7.50 each; 5 to 10 copies, $5.00 each; over 10 copies, $3.50 each. Please add 5 per cent shipping and handling and 5 per cent GST. Please contact Distribution at Barnett House at distribution@ata.ab.ca to place your order.

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From the President

The Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) has had a busy year planning and hosting two conferences in a tight time frame.

In May, RMEC and the Social Studies Council hosted Brave Teacher: The Cost of Courage and Call to Hope, in Calgary. General Roméo Dallaire, Dr Eric Vermetten and Suzette Brémault-Phillips, PhD, came to speak to teachers who had just journeyed for two years through the COVID-19 global pandemic. Our esteemed speakers gave us tools to recharge and inspire resilience in times of crisis.

Our second conference this year was Braiding Together: Dialogue Towards Truth and Reconciliation. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) drew the attention of teachers through its 94 calls to action. In the spring of 2021, mass unmarked graves were found at residential school sites in Kamloops and other places. In April of this year, Pope Francis apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in residential schools, and in July, he visited Canada to further the work of reconciliation with residential school Survivors and their descendants.

In October, RMEC brought Indigenous speakers Phyllis Webstad, Chief Cadmus Delorme and Chief Wilton Littlechild to Banff to share their perspectives on the residential school tragedies and the journey to truth and reconciliation. Three western Canadian bishops who were part of the delegation to Rome earlier this year—Archbishop Donald Bolen, Archbishop Richard Smith and Bishop William McGrattan—also shared their wisdom.

Catholic teachers want to follow Pope Francis's apology with concrete actions toward reconciliation. We hope that through this conference we, as teachers, will become more able to answer the TRC calls to action. This action now takes the form of listening and learning, so that we can implement in our schools and classrooms the lessons learned. Perhaps then we can do our part to heal the intergenerational trauma left by residential schools.

Reference

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Dan McLaughlin

A Note from the Editor

This issue of *Fully Alive* arrives in the wake of what has been called the papal pilgrimage of penance, when Pope Francis travelled to Edmonton, Maskwacis, the Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples and Lac Ste Anne, in July. His visit was intended to amplify the apology he began in Rome this spring.

We teachers also continue our journeys of truth and reconciliation in our classrooms and schools and in our hearts and minds. In the pages that follow, you will be invited to reflect on decolonization actions and healing. A variety of articles on specific teaching issues and general topics follow.

I hope that the beginning of your school year has been thrilling and that you find support for your teaching in these pages. After Braiding Together, our annual conference held in Banff in mid-October, I look forward to continuing our individual and collective work on truth and reconciliation through critical conversations surrounding the TRC calls to action.

Elaine Willette-Larsen

The Religious and Moral Education Council

Mission

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of our members in the field of religious and moral education.

Vision

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.

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Your RMEC executive members give their time out of a genuine desire to serve you, our members, and to further develop religious and moral education in Alberta. We hope you'll get involved too!

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Entry Points to Decolonizing Schools: Value, Healing and Flourishing

Angela Houle

Just Tell Me How to Do It

As an Indigenous education consultant who works with thousands of teachers and educational leaders, I am often asked for decolonization how-to advice.

Decolonization is the effort or work of challenging the dominance and assumed superiority of the colonizing group. It involves revitalizing the ways of being and knowing that existed prior to colonization (Smith 2012). According to Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2012a, 2012b), decolonizing education involves deconstructing the current system, which is heavily influenced by northern European values and Judeo-Christian religious philosophies (Cottrell, Preston and Pearce 2012), and reconstructing it in a way that incorporates aspects of Indigenous culture and educational practices.

In the past, I have been resistant to providing how-to advice. Before attempting the work of decolonizing schools, educators should learn about themselves and their own positionality in the world (Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019); learn about the history of schooling as a colonizing tool (Carr-Stewart 2001; Littlejohn 2006; Regan 2010); and develop an understanding of Indigenous Peoples, cultures and world views. There is no shortcut.

Given that this is the third article in a series,[1] I now feel more comfortable talking about how to enter into the real-life work in educational settings, but I approach this discussion with humility. I have experience with doing this work and have had the opportunity to learn from many people in the field, but I am always learning.

With that in mind, I will focus my understanding and experience of decolonizing schools by referring to the work of two people I consider experts in this field. In their 2021 article "The Insufficiency of High School Completion Rates to Redress Educational Inequities Among Indigenous Students," Dustin William Louie and Dianne Gereluk challenge educators to examine their approach to education: "Instead of simply pushing students through the system, we must ask whether we have transformed schools into places of *value, healing*, and *flourishing* for Indigenous learners" (p 53; italics added). Indeed, we should do so for all learners, because that is the type of education all students deserve. If educators consider creating educational spaces that embody value, healing and flourishing as their goal, decolonization may feel less intimidating.

Decolonization of schooling cannot and should not be oversimplified, because the decolonization of schools is complex. It starts with educators considering "their own positionality and responsibility in this work" (Poitras Pratt et al 2018, 18). Then, it becomes a journey, but each step on the journey is manageable. Decolonizing schools and classrooms poses a significant challenge, with lofty goals for everyone in education, but schools and education systems can pursue this work safely and effectively if they are considerate, careful and consistent in the steps along the path.

This article explores strategies for and examples of decolonizing educational spaces, using the three descriptors from Louie and Gereluk (2021) as a guide.

When the best happens in a school, the school is a place of value to and for learners, a place of healing for learners and a place where learners can flourish.

Schools as Places of Value

Places of education can have value to Indigenous learners (and all learners) when they are brought alive through relevance, stories, ties to the land and hands-on activities (Canadian Council on Learning 2007).

Providing students with a justification for why you have chosen to teach them about something is foundational to good pedagogy, but asking them what they value and are interested in and choosing to teach those topics through curriculum is far more responsive. When you ask students what they want to learn about and do your best to integrate that with the curriculum, you are decolonizing education.

An even more meaningful approach to making your school a place of value would be to ask students about their own personal or cultural values and then create a school or classroom that learns about and upholds those values at all times. Creating a classroom that treats diverse values with respect and dignity means truly creating a safe space for students, because they feel valued and respected in their learning.

Indigenous cultures are predominantly oral cultures: "[Indigenous] societies in North America have relied on the oral transmission of stories, histories, lessons and other knowledge to maintain a historical record and sustain their cultures and identities" (Hanson, nd). Oral traditions are "the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation" (Hulan and Eigenbrod 2008). Often, lessons, histories and agreements were and are taught about and remembered through stories.

Everyone loves stories, and they are incredibly effective learning tools. What Indigenous cultures have known for centuries about the value of stories as teaching tools, as history holders and as entertainment, Western science has recently proven. When one is reading data or sifting through a factual document, the brain is stimulated in only two areas—Broca's area and Wernicke's area. The only process that takes place is the brain translating the information into meaning. Comparatively, when one is being told a story, more than the language processors are stimulated; in fact, up to seven areas of the brain come to life and work to comprehend and enrich the story. Stories contain words that stimulate the senses—allowing the brain to more easily imagine, embellish and recall information. Because of the power of the stimulated sensory receptors, stories are also easier to remember. They provide us with characters we can identify with and trigger emotion, which is a neural activator. Stories create engagement and investment.[2]

Stories can be used in a variety of ways and subject areas. Here's an example from my own life. After failing Grade 12 geotrigonometry in regular session, I had to retake it in summer school. It's been 25 years, and I still remember that summer school math teacher, down on one knee with a pretend rifle (a metre stick) at his shoulder, talking about angles while telling us a story about hunting ducks. I scored 30 percentage points higher in that class than with the previous teacher, who taught the concepts using only the textbook.

Students are engaged by stories. Choosing stories written by diverse authors from diverse cultures and backgrounds, while respecting the cultures of the territory where you are teaching, is also creating a classroom that will be of value to more students in your class. Stories are decolonial ways of remembering, identifying and commemorating. They are decolonial teaching tools.

Wildcat et al (2014) assert that because colonization is about divesting Indigenous Peoples from land, decolonization must then involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous Peoples to land, social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land. As Elder W First Rider (2022) says, for Indigenous people, "everything starts and ends with the land."

The popularity of land acknowledgements represents a fledgling effort to recognize this Indigenous value. However, decolonizing your classroom must involve more than reading or memorizing a land acknowledgement. Consider having students study their own relationship to and appreciation of the land, or their stories of how they came to be on this land. They could write their own land acknowledgements or create a plan to somehow give back to, care for or appreciate the land. Having students create something from the land (or on the land) with their own hands is decolonizing education. Using the land as a teaching tool, while respecting the cultural teachings and values of the Indigenous Peoples of the territory, is another way to do this work. For example, use a

buffalo jump or a river as a teaching tool for math or science, but also learn the significance, history and stories of those landmarks from the Indigenous Peoples of the territory and teach those aspects alongside the lesson on trajectory, gravity or speed.

Teach the full context of any Indigenous content you use in the classroom, not just the specific aspect of it that applies to the lesson. A great example of this is the milk jug igloo that many elementary teachers make with their students. This can be a great hands-on lesson about the land, but it is inappropriate if Inuit are not studied more fully. Look at other types of Inuit dwellings; the skills, tools and materials needed to make such dwellings; the teachings about how to behave and what happens in the dwellings; and all other such contextual knowledge. This will ensure that students learn about Inuit culture, as well as the ingenuity, resourcefulness and skill required for survival in the north. Take it one step further and incorporate stories about and value teachings from within Inuit culture, teaching about more than just the lodging. Teaching the full context of any Indigenous content included in lessons will ensure that you are appreciating the culture, rather than appropriating it.

Educators can create educational spaces of value to students by including and respecting students' values and the values of other cultures; by incorporating stories into lessons to create engagement and creativity; and by creating lessons that incorporate the land, use the land and connect students to the land. Learning and teaching the context of all Indigenous content, history and culture incorporated into classroom teaching will ensure that the content does not appear tokenistic. Indigenous content must be honoured, respected, and given adequate time and attention. For true decolonization to happen, space must be created for other ways of being, knowing and learning. Together, these strategies will help educators make schools a place of value to learners.

Schools as Places of Healing

Attempting to realize schools as places of healing is a revolutionary aim. Historically, schools have *not* been places of healing. Some would argue that healing is not the job of education, and they would not necessarily be wrong. I would ask, What is your definition of *healing*? Is it a colonized definition? Do you understand the Indigenous concept of healing? If you do not, I suggest reading Wab Kinew's (2015) memoir *The Reason You Walk*, or almost any novel by Richard Wagamese. These books will start to give you an idea of Indigenous perspectives on healing.

In the meantime, here is a brief explanation of the difference between the two world views. The Western perspective (including Western medicine) views healing as a physical process whereby the body overcomes an injury or disease. If you are not overcoming that injury or disease, then you are not healing; you are dying. To be healing, you must be returning to the state you were in before the injury or illness.

The Indigenous world view is much more holistic. Anything that makes you feel better, even for a moment, is healing. Sleep, laughter, going for a walk, sunlight, hugging someone you love—all of those things are healing. In his book, Kinew (2015) follows his father's journey through cancer. When his father feels well enough to go for a walk, or to go into community or ceremony, those around him speak of his healing that day.

By embodying the Indigenous conception of healing, schools can strive to be healing spaces. Educators are not healers in the Western paradigm of healing, but they can create environments of healing from the Indigenous perspective in their classrooms. To create a healing space, they need only provide a safe, respectful, nurturing environment where students feel valued.

As a classroom teacher, I am highly interactive. I like to tell jokes and stories and to laugh with my students, but I respect them and hold high expectations for them. About seven years into my teaching career, I was shocked when a guidance counsellor told me that students who dealt heavily with anxiety requested my classes. They felt safe in my classroom. More than once, a student reintegrating into school after a stay in the hospital for mental health reasons chose my class as their re-entry point. This was hard for me to understand. I am loud and energetic, and I encourage student collaboration and discussion in class—not an environment I would expect students who are anxious or who have other mental health struggles would feel best suited to their needs.

However, as the counsellor explained to me, these students liked that my classroom expectations were created communally and upheld. Every day I put the class agenda for that day on the board (as well as the agendas for the next few days) so that students knew

and could prepare for what was coming, and I created a safe, warm space. It did not matter to students that class time may involve spontaneous conversations and debates, cooperative learning, and high standards for student achievement. To them, my classroom was a caring, respectful and safe place—a place where they wanted to be, a healing space.

Schools as Places Where Students Flourish

The final descriptor Louie and Gereluk (2021) use to define decolonized educational spaces is *flourish*. More specifically, they write, "School systems are one of the basic foundations of society and play a leading role in providing the conditions for all students to have greater life prospects and to flourish in them" (p 55). If we define *flourishing* as "rapidly developing, successful and thriving," then spaces that create value and promote healing are important.

According to Martin Brokenleg's (1998) Circle of Courage, the flourishing of Indigenous students (and all students) can be supported by ensuring that each student has a sense of belonging, a feeling of mastery, and the ability to be generous and independent in their learning spaces. Implementing the Circle of Courage philosophy is a decolonizing strategy to ensure that students flourish in schools.

Brokenleg (1998) writes extensively about the importance of belonging in relation to the success of young Indigenous people. He writes, "Belonging is the organizing principle in Partnership cultures. Significance is assured by belonging" (p 131). This has been empirically studied by Fong Lam et al (2015), who found that "students with a greater sense of school belonging have more positive emotions (both activating and deactivating) and fewer negative deactivating emotions, which in turn contribute to their academic success."

Another principle of the Circle of Courage is that students need to feel a sense of mastery over something. As Brokenleg (1998, 132) writes, "Mastery measures competence by an individual's progress relative to past performance rather than in comparison to others."

Students also need to feel a sense of independence and power over their own lives and choices. Brokenleg (1998, 132) writes, "Independence is the only principle that allows all persons to exert power over their lives. In Dominator systems, only a few can occupy coveted positions of power; the majority are obliged to submit."

Finally, generosity is paramount. In many Indigenous cultures, a person's worth is measured by how much they can give away. In contrast, in colonizer cultures, value is placed on how many materialistic items a person can accumulate. Brokenleg (1998, 132) writes, "Generosity is the measure of virtue in Partnership cultures, where relationships are more important than possessions." Creating spaces where relationships are more important than belongings and creating people for whom relationships with others are more important than possessions are decolonial acts.

If you create a space of value, healing and belonging, where students can exhibit mastery and feel the capacity for independence and generosity in the ways described above (and in other ways that work for your own setting, teaching style and curriculum), students will flourish. However, you must decolonize both how you define and how you measure whether a student is flourishing (Canadian Council on Learning 2007; Louie and Gereluk 2021) and how you celebrate it. A common theme of many decolonizing strategies is the decentralization of control. With that in mind, ask students how they would measure success in school, and take their measures into account. Be careful, ask questions and listen to students' answers when you ask them if and how you can celebrate their success.

How to Start and What to Be Mindful Of

My hope is that this article will make starting the work of decolonization in your school or classroom feel more accessible. With that, some of the complexities of the work should also be acknowledged.

The most common thing I hear from educators is that they are afraid they will do something wrong or that they will be publicly targeted or misrepresented (on social media, for example) (Houle 2022). That is why it is critical that you do the work of locating yourself and understanding the theory before beginning (Houle 2021; Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019). You must also approach the work humbly and, wherever possible, build authentic relationships with Indigenous people of the territory you work in (Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019). You will make mistakes, and people may take

issue with things you do, but through humility and relationships, you can overcome those mistakes. This work takes preparation as well as courage.

How do you get started? First, identify an entry point: identify where, when and how colonization plays out in the school setting. Where are some great entry points in schools? Look for schoolwide processes and practices as opportunities to decolonize a process for a large group:

- Parent–teacher interviews
- Welcoming to the school and classrooms
- Parent contact
- Student or parent assemblies

Watch for the following signs of colonization:

- A story is being told from a single perspective, and other perspectives are lacking or ignored.
- One culture's or group's way of doing things is thought of as being better than another's, and there is no openness to discussion of change.
- Histories and practices have been erased.

An example of a story being told from only one perspective, effectively erasing history and historical practices, is Canada's national anthem, which was written in 1880 but not formally adopted until 1980. In my work, I am often approached by well-meaning, thoughtful educators who want to find a version of the national anthem sung by an Indigenous artist, sung in an Indigenous language or played using Indigenous instruments. These educators have good intentions and are looking for another way to approach an obviously colonial aspect of the school day.

However, the problem here is that these requests seek to Indigenize a colonial practice, rather than decolonize a space. To decolonize the national anthem, educators must learn about, honour and create space for an Indigenous practice similar to the national anthem. Long before "O Canada," Indigenous Peoples had territorial songs for this land. In Blackfoot territory, where I live, work and play as a guest, an honour song or a flag song is the cultural equivalent to a national anthem (First Rider 2022). The honour song or flag song does not have to replace the national anthem but can and should be played before or after it, giving each song equal value and place. That is truly creating space for more than one way of being and doing.

Once you have chosen a colonial practice or process that can be changed to improve the educational experience of all, identify how it is harmful—or, at best, not the wisest practice. Change is often challenged in educational settings (Burm 2019), and you will want to be able to understand and explain your choices. After identifying how the colonial practice or process can be improved, you must choose an effective strategy for the change that is needed. Finally, it must be a sustainable change, not just a one-time effort.

Understanding that decolonizing efforts in schools are accessible while also acknowledging the complexity is important to the success of this work. You must

- choose a colonized aspect of your educational spaces to decolonize,
- decide on and implement the most effective strategy to create the needed change,
- understand your own choices so that you can effectively answer questions from your community, and
- ensure that the changes are sustainable so that if you are no longer in that space, the practice can continue.

Power Dynamics in This Work

Last, always stop and consider the power dynamics in every decolonization effort. This will ensure that you are not embodying white saviourism, which almost always happens unintentionally. It is imperative that your efforts do not portray Indigenous people as passive recipients of white benevolence. As Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2019, 11) write, "This type of helping can ultimately disempower those whom you are trying to help" (and, understandably, can lead to animosity or resentment).

Ensure that decolonizing practices are being implemented for the right reasons. Be sure that actions are taken to truly benefit all students, not simply to satisfy a school plan requirement or a government mandate. Embark on all efforts with care and humility. Embrace the work fully, not simply choosing what feels or looks best and what is easiest. White educators must acknowledge their privilege and recognize and continually challenge their own biases. They also must learn about the values and cultures present and represented in their space, and actively repudiate racism, white

supremacy and oppression in that space (Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019; Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017).

If the term *white saviour* is troubling to you, that is OK and you are not alone. This reaction is to be expected, and it does not make you a bad person. A First Nations Indigenous studies professor (whose name I cannot remember, sadly, as that was 20 years ago) told our entire class, "If you don't get mad at least once in this class, then you aren't listening." Much of the work of decolonization challenges the power dynamics we have grown up with.

If the term *white saviourism* causes cognitive dissonance, then the term *white fragility* may help with clarity. White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering defensive reactions (DiAngelo 2018). These reactions can include anger, fear and guilt, as well as behaviours such as argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation. White people have never had to consider their own race in these ways before. As members of the dominant, colonizer society, their race or skin colour has never been called into question; rather, it has always been assumed superior or, at best, neutral. So it makes sense that having to consider these things is foreign and frustrating.

Decolonization is a learning process, and learning is not always easy. Again, if these terms or concepts cause an emotional reaction, that is normal. They challenge the power dynamics of society that we all are accustomed to. Please use that defensive reaction as a good place to start looking deeper into this work (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017).

Conclusion

Most aspects of the education system continue to be based on one dominant world view—that of the colonizer. Despite that, decolonization does not devalue Western ways; rather, it asks for other ways to be given equal consideration and respect, alongside Western ways. Decolonizing strategies ask educators to start thinking about education differently.

As Louie and Gereluk (2021) assert, students need schools to be places of value, healing and flourishing. Educators must embrace Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies systemically—not on the fringes, as an exception or in optional courses (Furniss 1999). Embracing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational strategies and processes while reimagining a system that implements the best parts of learning and assessment from each way of being is a lofty goal, but if education systems can recognize and use the strengths of each system, then all students will receive the education they deserve.

Notes

1. See also "How Teachers Can Humbly and Respectfully Address the Tragedy of Residential Schools" (Houle 2021) and "Decolonization: Professional Requirement and Moral Imperative" (Houle 2022).

2. For more information on the science of how storytelling affects the brain (with illustrations), see JGR Communications (2016).

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Reconciliation and Healing 101: Moving from Vulnerability to Action

Sister Zoe Bernatsky

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC 2015) calls to action include several tasks for the Christian community. These include teaching congregations and students of theology about the role of churches in colonization and residential schools, promoting healing for those harmed by residential schools, and fostering respect for Indigenous spirituality. Furthermore, we are called to teach about the effects of spiritual violence and to embrace the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.[1] Reflection upon the concepts that have justified colonialism and settler sovereignty over Indigenous Peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, must translate into a new awareness of what it means for all of us to be treaty people who bear responsibility for agreements signed in the name of Canadian citizens.

This responsibility is not lost on me. Like many others, I have incorporated modules on the legacy of residential schools into my classes and have dedicated time to reflecting on the issues. However, at times I have encountered, in myself and in my students, an unenthusiastic embrace of these calls. I ask myself, *Am I (or my students) more committed to change as a result of our study?* In other words, is conscience formation through education the first step forward, or is there something more foundational that will provide the necessary stimulus for moral action? What is the best way to address resistance in the moral life?

Jesuit moral theologian James Keenan provides some helpful insights. Simply put, he argues that our vulnerability connects us to God and other people and precedes moral action. In the 2022 D'Arcy Lectures, he reflects on vulnerability as the precursor to the moral life, using examples such as the personal loss of a loved one and large-scale tragedies (such as 9/11, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the murder of Black men and women in the United States).[2]

Vulnerability, Keenan says, brings us face to face with the theological anthropology we profess as Christians. We are created in the image and likeness of God, who is Trinity. As the three persons of the Holy Trinity are in relationship with each other, we, too, are created to live in relationship with others. We are mutually dependent upon others, just as we are dependent upon God. This reality underscores our vulnerability and reinforces our social nature, our connectivity. The result of this vulnerability is that recognizing it opens us up to a compassionate embrace of our brothers and sisters in their vulnerable state.

Keenan poses a question: What would have happened if Americans had paused individually and collectively and embraced their grief and vulnerability, rather than rushing out to war, after the tragedy of 9/11? In the Canadian context, what would happen if we grieved our past and reflected on the vulnerability that is true for each of us, a quality we all share. Once I recognize my vulnerability, I can see others who are hurting but whom I did not acknowledge. Like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, I walked by. I did not see the suffering other. I did not grieve the unfortunate state of the person so different from myself.

Learning that we as Canadians have not been faithful to the treaty commitments is sobering. We have

left people suffering on the roadside and driven by. Reflecting on the injustice found in the *Indian Act* is overwhelming. I need to grieve that reality and let it transform me into a person who recognizes the suffering other. The first step in this process is to move beyond the darkness of shame and to allow God's love to transform me. Is this not the wisdom of Pope Francis, who calls us to accompany those who are suffering at the margins, the unrecognized, the "ungrievable" in our eyes?

As a Jesuit, Keenan draws from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, a series of contemplative exercises aimed at growing in one's spiritual life.[3] As a person (or, on occasion, a group of people) works through reflective exercises with a guide or spiritual director, they engage their mind, heart and all the senses. The exercises are organized into four stages called weeks (which are not necessarily seven days). Each week highlights a different theme or movement in the spiritual life.

In the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, we are confronted with our vulnerability. Here, we see sin and chaos all around us. We are sinned against, and we sin against others, yet we are loved sinners. In the following weeks, we reflect upon the incarnation and the manifestation of God's love offered in weakness. God chose to come and conquer death through vulnerability, not through worldly strength.

This, I believe, is an essential place to begin work related to solidarity with those who are suffering. Recognizing our vulnerability, that we sin and are sinned against, is a "cannonball moment," as described in the conversion of Saint Ignatius. With our Indigenous brothers and sisters, we share a common space of being loved sinners in a world of chaos. This attitude of accompaniment energizes us to dialogue with Indigenous people. This is the work of the first week of the exercises. The other weeks teach us other things about dialogue and discernment, but the first week teaches us who we are and how we belong to each other—in vulnerability.

An important element of reconciliation is honesty and humility. Can we ever really repair a fractured relationship? Not easily, but we can choose to journey together in deep respect, care and concern as healing takes place in both parties. A significant barrier to the spiritual life is the inability to listen—to God or to reality. Can I sufficiently still myself in order to listen? For listening is key to dialogue.

In the first week of the exercises, we are focused on self-awareness. We examine what keeps us stuck in sin and resistant to moving forward. In addition to the internal processes, we examine the structures that support injustice, violence and oppression. We come to understand those habits we perpetuate, seemingly without thinking. We can see the impacts of these sinful tendencies, not only on ourselves but on our community and our world. God desires that we see the stakes clearly—and then act for the good.

An important element of reconciliation is honesty and humility. Can we ever really repair a fractured relationship? Not easily, but we can choose to journey together in deep respect, care and concern as healing takes place in both parties.

Growing in freedom requires trust in God. We need to feel safe and nurtured to do the challenging work of admitting our sinfulness and vulnerability, but from that place of vulnerability, we can reach out to others who are suffering. This is the real work of the Christian life. To build trust in God requires that we grow in relationship with God by spending time together through various spiritual practices. Before starting the first week of the exercises, we are reminded that the bedrock of our relationship with God rests on the notion that we were made to "praise, reverence, and serve God" (Ignatius 1914), as stated in the Principle and Foundation, which begins the Spiritual Exercises.[4] Everything we have and all that we are are in service to that end. I am not a self-made person; I am dependent on others, and I am vulnerable. The work of keeping God first and joining in solidarity with others is ongoing. In Ignatian spirituality, we are asked to look for God in all things.[5] Actively looking for God keeps my focus away from myself and keeps God at the centre. Keeping God at the centre of my life gives me hope.

So how does this fit with the calls to action articulated by the TRC (2015)? The visit of Indigenous people with Pope Francis in Rome in April 2022 and the pope's visit to Canada in July 2022 model a way forward. Pope Francis listened and extended an olive branch. He did not fix the problem, but he listened with compassion to the experience of pain and suffering of fellow human beings. Accompaniment is his way forward and our way as well. We engage in this activity not because we are stellar Christians but, rather, because we share a common humanity. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (among other places), Pope Francis underscores this: "The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other."[6]

Let Pope Francis's visit to Canada inspire our journey of reconciliation, a journey of great hope because we are loved sinners. The grace of the Holy Spirit moves us to conversion; it also allows others to forgive us.

Notes

1. United Nations General Assembly, resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,* A/RES/61/295, October 2, 2007, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf (accessed September 29, 2022).

2. Father James Keenan's 2022 D'Arcy Lectures are available at www.youtube.com/channel/UC1EQKptAJEiKJK4cM_jt2Dg (accessed September 29, 2022).

3. The Spiritual Exercises is a program that guides a retreatant through a systematic process of deepening their spiritual life and arriving at a state of freedom. From a place of freedom, one finds that the desires of one's own heart are closely aligned with God's desires, rather than by "inordinate attachments" related to selfish aspirations. Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) developed this program following a devastating injury he sustained in battle. He began a journey of self-discovery and transformation that led him to a radical conversion. He, along with those who joined him to found the Companions of Jesus (Jesuits), shared the exercises with many other pilgrims in the spiritual life—a tradition that continues. The Spiritual Exercises can be completed in one month at a retreat centre or over a one-year period (referred to as the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life or the 19th Annotation). For more information, go to www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ (accessed September 29, 2022).

4. See www.ignatianspirituality.com/reimagining-the-ignatian-examen-flip-book-praise-reverence-service/ (accessed September 29, 2022).

5. See www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/the-ignatian-way/finding-god-in-all-things/ (accessed September 29, 2022).

6. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [apostolic exhortation], 169, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed September 29, 2022).

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The Wonderful World of Prayer

Kathleen Nguyen

During my childhood, our family had a ritual each week that I anticipated eagerly. Each Sunday evening after dinner, we would sit together and watch *The Wonderful World of Disney*.

Every week I would look forward to these family-friendly shows, because they were uplifting and heartwarming. It didn't matter whether it was my first time seeing a particular show or my fifth time. The shows made you experience every type of human emotion: surprise, happiness, sadness, fear and even anger. They felt like home.

To this day, I remember so many movies and songs and have deep memories that connect back to *The Wonderful World of Disney*. More than the shows themselves, however, the regularity and the bond created are what made the experience last.

My "wish upon a star" for future generations (our children and our students) is that they will experience prayer in the same way—by experiencing prayer daily, by being exposed to various forms of prayer and by being allowed to experience every type of emotion. Most important, I hope that they will build their relationship with God through prayer—a relationship so deep that memories will be connected to it, it will remain timeless and it will feel like home.

Friends, how might you create a Wonderful World of Prayer for your students this year?

Your Wonderful World of Prayer

Several years ago, I was on a secondment, working in a fast-paced job, with high demands, tight timelines and many working pieces. The project was a never-before-been-done initiative, and I had to figure things out as I went. It involved many people, with different needs and wants, which overwhelmed me on occasion.

I was blessed with an incredible director who mentored and supported me, and I would humbly go to him as a tense ball of worry, seeking advice. Every single time he would very gently, filled with compassion and mercy, say, "I don't mean to sound harsh, but, Kathleen, how is your prayer life?"

At first, I needed him to explain this. The Coles Notes version is that he was humbly asking me to reflect on my relationship with God through prayer: Had I given my worries and struggles up to God? Had I been actively seeking God's voice in conversations with others? Or was I trying to be in control of my world?

We had a chapel in the building, and I would go there directly after talking with my director, share all my concerns and worries with God, and leave feeling lighter. After that, to my surprise, when I really listened, my questions would be answered, or my problems solved, just by hearing God speak to me through the people around me.

I didn't get it the first time or even the second time around. I would continue to go to my director many more times in a panic, and he would say those same words to me. With guidance, I started to understand. I just needed a consistent reminder. Every time I came to God in prayer, I would feel better about my situation and have a sense of what to do moving forward.

This is a cycle that continues, even though I know better. Sometimes I get caught up in life's busyness,

the rush and panic, and I forget to ground myself in prayer, touching base with my friend Jesus, who always listens and who always gives advice (if I just pause to listen). When I do this, I am taking a step back from just getting things done and trying to be in control. I re-evaluate the situation and realize I am not alone.

Friends, I humbly ask, How is your prayer life? How might you give worry, stress or anxiety up to God?

Prayer Doesn't Have to Be Fancy

When I moved from a Grade 1 classroom to a secondment with the Archdiocese of Edmonton in the Pastoral Office, I was surrounded by beautiful, faith-filled people. It was such an amazing and rich experience. One of the many inspiring moments was listening to the lovely spontaneous prayers my colleagues could just breathe out of thin air. I was in awe; it was like poetry and art mixed together. In my Grade 1 classroom, our prayers had been simple, traditional and straightforward.

Let's imagine that the various types of prayer our Catholic Church has given us are tools we can give to our students.

In this new position, I had regular meetings with my working committee, which was composed of three superintendents, my director and a priest. All of them were intelligent leaders of complex religious communities and were extremely busy. I had to carefully and strategically plan the meeting agenda, keep to the short time and allow for optimum feedback with little conversation.

I focused so hard on the contents of the meeting that I often relied on the priest to help with the opening and closing prayers. Then one day it happened. The priest had to leave without warning, and I was put on the spot to pray. Eek! Gingerly, I put my hands together and closed my eyes, like a child kneeling beside the bed for prayer time, and said these words:

Dear Jesus,
Thank you for our meeting.
Help us to have a good summer.
Amen.

Oh, my goodness. I was so embarrassed. It was the most basic and elementary-style prayer I think I have ever prayed in my life. I was a bit horrified.

Years later, I found this quotation from Pope Francis: "To be friends with God means to pray with simplicity, like children talking to their parents" (Assaf 2015, 61). These words fill me with humility and take me back to that moment when I felt so vulnerable and embarrassed about my childlike prayer. It was humbling to realize that I had forgotten who I was talking to and that I was more focused on impressing those around me.

Have you ever felt disconnected during a prayer, letting the mode of prayer hinder your opportunity to talk to God like you would to your deepest, most trusted friend? Have you tried to start a prayer routine and then been hard on yourself if it didn't work? Do you feel like your prayer should be elaborate, and that just isn't who you are?

As I continue my faith journey, I try to be kind to myself and realize that what matters is my relationship with God and how often I talk with him, not how fancy the prayer is. The only way to grow deeper in relationship with someone is to become vulnerable, to share what is on your heart, to sit quietly together and to take the time to listen to one another. It doesn't matter how fancy or how simple the meeting is between you and God. He just wants to be in relationship with you.

Friends, how might you be humble in your approach to prayer this year?

Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ

As educators, we are entrusted with teaching our bishop's approved religious education program for Grades 1–8: Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ.[1] This delightful and rigorous program allows our students (and us) to experience and practise this way of life through daily prayer.

Prayer is central to the program and is one of the six strands of catechesis woven throughout the grades. Students have ample opportunity to learn about the forms and types of prayer. Then, they experience these in a different way each year. Their knowledge about prayer is built upon each year, relying on learning, experience and practice. Prayer is so integral to the program that an entire section in the front matter of

the resource is dedicated to prayer in the classroom.

Every teaching moment provides an opportunity for students to learn and experience various forms of prayer. I always beg my teachers not to leave prayer out! At times, students will formally learn about and experience prayer; at other times, they may just experience prayer. They will have opportunities to pray traditional prayers, sometimes with big words, and the sacredness of the moment is the teaching. Prayer is a way to help our students continue developing a personal connection with God and allows them to express their faith.

Prayer builds community, as it helps students know that they are cared for, that God listens to them and so do their classmates. As a teacher, I always established a prayer routine at the beginning of the school year. This was a subtle way to create a positive classroom community, and it also helped with classroom management. I encouraged my students to pray for people and about things that were happening in their life. Their worries, fears and gratitude were always placed gently into the hands of God. Being vulnerable and hearing what is on others' minds helps students build compassion for each other.

As I taught the religion curriculum throughout the year, my students had many opportunities to experience various forms of prayer. Some of these forms I personally connected with, and others not as much, but I taught them all with the same enthusiasm and care. The beauty of our Catholic Church is that it is universal; it is for everyone. As educators, we understand that there are many ways to learn, and our Church also embraces this.

I used to use the analogy of a toolbelt, but now the cool accessory for carrying your necessary items is a fanny pack. And what's even cooler is wearing a fanny pack across your chest. Let's imagine that the various types of prayer our Catholic Church has given us are tools we can give to our students. These tools go into students' fanny packs and remain close to their hearts. When they need these prayers at various times in their life, they can quickly pull them out, because they hold them close. Make sure you help your students pack up their fanny packs of prayers.

Friends, how might you access the prayers in the Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ program throughout the school year?

Interactive Prayer Table

A feature you will see when stepping into a Catholic classroom is a prayer table. In Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ, the section titled "Classroom Sacred Space: Interactive Prayer Table" outlines what can be included on your prayer table.

Place a desk or small table in a prominent area in your classroom and include these items:

- A tablecloth of a colour that reflects the liturgical season
- A Bible
- A crucifix or cross
- A plant or flowers (live or silk) or another symbol of life (such as a globe)
- A flameless candle
- A prayer basket

The prayer table should be an inviting, safe and sacred place for students to come to, get comfortable and pray. This sacred space allows them to enter into conversation with God, their Father. As a teacher, you can stand or sit by the prayer table when praying during snack or other mealtimes, or during morning and end-of-day prayers. Make it a lived space each day. Remind your students that God is present.

As a prayer table is usually at the front of the classroom, it is tempting to let it become a collection of paperwork and symbols or trinkets that relate to themes in the life of your classroom and school. Always ask yourself, *Does this item directly link to our Catholic faith and Catholic teaching?*

One way to bring your prayer table to life is by including a picture of the saints or other holy people your students are learning about at that time. Similarly, when you are learning about the rosary, place one on the table. If you are learning about *lectio divina* or the Examen, place the steps to the prayer on the prayer table.

Students can come to the table to pray through Scripture, revisiting stories and passages from previous lessons. Or they can create beautiful art based on Scripture. For example, students carefully write

down a quotation from Scripture found in the student book. Then, they embellish the quotation with colour and designs. The quotation is then displayed on the table, inviting students to come to the table in prayer.

Give students a leadership role with the prayer table, so that it becomes part of their routine, their space and their sense of care. Let them be responsible for changing the colour of the cloth for the liturgical season, placing the Advent wreath, turning on battery-operated candles, placing the nativity, or placing symbols for Lent and Easter. The prayer table should feel just as much theirs as it is yours. After all, it is our hope that our students will continue to have an active prayer life after they leave the halls of our school.

Friends, in what ways might you make your prayer table interactive throughout the year?

Conclusion

The early versions of *The Wonderful World of Disney* always began with Walt Disney himself introducing the featured show. By the time I was watching, Walt had died, there had been several changes in leadership, and CEO Michael Eisner had taken over the introduction. As a child, I didn't realize how impactful this short introduction was. Now I realize that it set the tone for watching and established a relationship with the viewer. Whether Walt or Michael, the host was always there to welcome me, happy to see me and gave me secret insight into the show I was about to watch. It made me feel special and valued.

The analogy stops here, because *The Wonderful World of Disney* is merely a television show, and Walt Disney is not God. Prayer is not simply an escape. It is not a mindful exercise for relaxation but, rather, a sacred time spent with the person who loves us the most. When we enter prayer, we must remember who it is we are talking to: God, our Father; Jesus, our friend; or Holy Spirit, our guide. We must be active participants in a relationship, speaking and listening.

The Wonderful World of Prayer is a gift you can pass on to your students that will last a lifetime. Some students will open the gift immediately and eagerly use it. Some students will open the gift, put it on a shelf and admire it. Some will put the gift away and use it later in life, when they find it or need it. Regardless of when or how your students access their prayer and continue to be in relationship with God, the most important piece is that you passed this gift on to them and that it will remain with them forever.

Note

1. See www.pearsoncanadaschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PS2qKs (accessed October 5, 2022).

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Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

The Long and Short of It: Student Questions and Teacher Responses in Religious Education

Matt Hoven

When my school-aged children ask me a question—say, something related to politics, religion or sports—they have the habit of adding, "Dad, just give me your short answer." They don't want to hear about the history of conservative parties in Alberta, the intricacies of biblical interpretation or the loopholes teams use to circumvent the salary cap. I've been forced into conciseness and correspondingly respond with the long and short of it. For religious educators, however, the long answer is sometimes necessary.

A recent Australian research study (Rymarz and Belmonte 2020) asked religious educators at all levels about the questions students asked in their classes. While early elementary children generally accepted the teacher's authority and responses, students in upper elementary and secondary school asked a range of challenging questions. The researchers categorized these questions as follows:

- Students asked metacognitive questions. They took a step back from the topic under discussion and wondered if they really believed in the underlying foundations. This led to questions such as, "Does God even exist?," "Is this religion the correct religion?" and "Why does a merciful God allow evil and violence?"
- Students asked thematic cognitive questions that directly looked at understanding the religious tradition: "What are the five pillars of Islam, and why are they practised?" or "Why are there four different gospel accounts in the Bible?"
- Teachers noted that students asked questions about how religious traditions respond to moral issues. These questions sought to understand doctrines and not so subtly asked why some churches or religions can oppose same-sex marriage, women as priests or pastors, or the skipping of weekly worship.

This threefold framework is helpful for categorizing the types of questions asked in the religious education classroom: Are they larger, big picture questions? Are the questions focused on understanding the religion? Do students feel frustrated by or curious about doctrinal stances on moral issues? Teacher responses can be supported in many ways.

A strong background in religious knowledge, a wealth of classroom experience, and online and school resources (such as other teachers or the school library) can aid teacher responses. Moreover, when a question is asked in the moment, teachers may need to defer their answer until outside of class time or until a future class time.

Quality responses can vary in length. For many questions, there is a short answer and a long answer. We may give a short answer to the question, "How did Noah fit all the earth's animals in the ark?" by simply saying that the story should not be taken as a historical account in the same way we learn about

historical events in social studies class. That is a short and direct answer, which allows the class lesson to move forward.

However, at times the distinction between the metacognitive questions and the thematic cognitive questions blurs. In these cases, students might want to flesh out the implications of the short answer. In the example of Noah's ark, students will want to know about the historicity of the Bible, the author's use of narrative or a current interpretative approach that makes sense today. The long answer demands much of religious education teachers, who despite much lesson plan preparation can feel overwhelmed by the metacognitive questioning of hard-nosed Grade 7 students. Religious education—and its students—can be more complex than many give it credit for being.

There is another consideration for the long answer. A Belgian professor has completed several massive international studies on Catholic schools and their religious identities. In a recent study (Pollefeyt 2021), he counterintuitively criticized religious schools that try too hard to be a welcoming and harmonious environment for children and their families. In much the same way that positive psychology stresses communal and individual happiness, positivity and well-being, these schools can unknowingly promote a positive theology that harmonizes the aims of religious life with this positive life stance. From this point of view, God always has a plan for us, never judges us and never turns away from us. Always speaking positively about faith and God may sound reassuring, but the study highlights how this approach does a disservice to religious learners.

When ambiguities, problems and pain flow into an older child's life, an overly positive religious faith no longer has satisfactory responses; in fact, adolescents can see its answers as being naive. For our purposes, the point of Pollefeyt's (2021) study is that pat-and-positive answers may do more harm than good in the long run. Instead, consider these questions: Do we as religious educators take the opportunity to be vulnerable with faith? Do we wrestle with what we find troubling in our souls and schools? Are we willing to recognize elements of paradox, symbolism and narrative as a means to find a more satisfying response?

There are no easy questions in religious education. If teachers have easy answers, then they haven't entered into the heart of an issue or recognized its complexities. Short answers will be necessary at times—along with deferring some questions until a more appropriate time—while long responses require deep reflection. Both studies discussed here recommend that teachers engage in professional development with other religious education teachers, recognize the importance of an engaging story or narrative, and try to discuss with students what questions matter most to them. Further educational training in religious education is also invaluable.

At our best, we teachers offer a short answer, hoping that someone asks an inquisitive follow-up question: "Ah, they've uncovered the larger issue!" Even my own children's curiosity sometimes gets the best of them—to my pleasure!

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Re-imagining a Better Tomorrow Through Pedagogies of Hope

Brandise Fehr

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[1] This quotation from Scripture captures the feelings of many during the past few years. Educators and students are living in uncertain times and are immersed in seemingly never-ending challenges. Struggles in education are at an all-time high, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of a controversial curriculum with a capitalist agenda, and other atrocities affecting educators and students.

How do faith-based educators not give in to the temptation to succumb to despair and grasp on to hopelessness? The need for global religious education is pressing and requires a re-imagining of society that offers possibilities for hope and change in trauma-based settings. To generate change, educators need to create a religious, shared context, with a new narrative in which faith-based pedagogies serve as a powerful resource that acknowledges current struggles, removes the burden from educators and places trust in God.

The Current State of Education

As Miedema (2017, 121) writes,

> There is, in my view, still an urgent need for a continuing and sustainable awareness in education towards pedagogy as a necessary counter-voice against the still influential neo-liberal rhetoric, politics and practices in which labor-market orientation and schooling as preparation for the knowledge-based economy are praised as the core aims of education in schools.

Students are immersed in a context that highlights individualism and dismisses community, that has the goal of preparing them for the workforce, and that does not consider their past trauma experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed for greater government control over curriculum and accountability, as seen in the implementation of Alberta's new curriculum and the increased number of standardized tests.

The purpose of this Eurocentric schooling model is "defined in terms of the effective production of a predetermined output, often measured in terms of exam-scores" (Miedema 2017, 122), but whose curriculum is it and who benefits? Is there consideration for marginalized groups? Schools preserve and deliver what they perceive as "legitimate knowledge," and this "knowledge for all" is related to the group's power in the larger political and economic arena (Apple 1974, 63).

Hope, Despair and Change

Educators can be prone to seeing the doom and gloom of an inequitable and unjust education system. Despair is a constant threat to hope, because the tendency toward despair is ever present, and "hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome" (Marcel 1962, 36). Despair is not inevitable, but the temptation to despair is, and hope helps us work against that temptation.

Christ endured temptation when he was led into the desert by the Spirit and tempted by the devil: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."[2] Christ was not exempt from the urge to despair, but he chose to find his strength and hope in God. By seeing a path through our circumstances, we can see "a hidden vision" and a "goal toward which we can strive" (Jacobs 2005, 793). This look into the

future isn't inevitable but is possible through our individual and collective availability and reflective practice (Marcel 1962). Hope allows us to see a changed future and a call to action, rather than merely a dream of a better tomorrow.

Pedagogies of Hope in Educational Policies and Practices

More space for education or pedagogy is critical when one is forced to teach a one-sided curriculum, especially when it comes to faith-based schooling. A pedagogy of hope is necessary because it offers social sustainability and development (Miedema 2017).

The pedagogical voices of teachers and school leaders must be louder in practical, social and political arenas. Educators are torn between teaching students the skills required for the knowledge economy and addressing the needs of the whole child, especially when students are dealing with trauma from COVID-19 and other injustices. How do we teach the curriculum when absenteeism is high and students are experiencing issues beyond the classroom?

Some teachers and principals are taking a stand against injustices and equipping themselves with a strong "teacher voice," but creating change will require collective action. What are the consequences of taking a stand professionally and personally?

In June, teachers in Alberta voted on an agreement with the government regarding their future collective agreements. By a small margin, teachers voted for a small increase in pay, more instructional minutes and a contract that fails to address complex classrooms. Teachers are now locked in to a contract for another two years during a time of political and economic instability. Only about half of teachers voted, so how well does this represent the interests of educators?

Religious educators should act as public intellectuals on par with secular educators for the benefit of children. There is limited pedagogical space, and if we do not occupy it, we will lose it. If we choose not to act, we are at risk of staying neutral and being influenced by others—what Freire (1996) identifies as *conscientização*, or "naïve conscience." This serves only to sustain and maintain oppressive ideologies.

Educators must be aware that by simply teaching the curriculum, they are reproducing a dominant neoliberal ideology and failing to create a shared context with students. Drawing upon the work of Freire (1996), I encourage you to challenge teacher-centred pedagogy, or the banking model of education, "in which purveyors of knowledge deposit information they possess into the waiting (and presumably empty) minds of students, much like making a deposit to a bank account which could then be withdrawn when required" (Mercer 2021, 99).

As Mercer (2021, 99) notes, Freire took no issue with content in itself; in fact, he contended that "there is no education without content." The problem lies in the teacher's delivery of the content. The content might be dictated by a curriculum, but educators must find space within that curriculum to encourage critical and creative thinking. They need to move beyond simply transmitting content to transforming and creating a shared context or meaningful connections (Hess 2020).

Hill (2016, 161) contends that no matter how rigid a curriculum is, there is always space for movement. For example, he suggests that teachers can ask their students, "Who do you think wrote this curriculum, and why do you think they included this content in the curriculum?" This encourages students to think critically about the curriculum and find alternatives to a capitalist agenda. Creating more "voice and choice" can create hope and empowerment and lead to change.

Dialogue of Love and Hope: Building a Shared Context

Hope is love, and hope is social. It is about joining together in loving communion with God and his children and sharing experiences.

As Hess (2020) discusses, pedagogies of hope must be trauma-informed from a communal perspective, with God as our biggest ally. Students and teachers have been through much trauma during the past few years and share individual perceptions and experiences. We are bombarded with information, but how do we know what is authentic? We need to teach in the moment, to *discover* and not just *cover* content. Truly listening to one another, sharing stories and supporting our students will create dialogue and build trust. Being genuine and vulnerable builds trust with our students, shapes our authority, creates a collective agency and dictates a new narrative of hope. Hess writes, "We need to walk . . . a path that is neither about transferring objective information, nor wallowing in individualist relativism, but rather one of relational knowing" (p 222).

Hess (2020) notes that we live in an era when social media has a huge influence on our lives, and it can be a space where public hatred is permitted and encouraged. How do we teach and learn in ways that support learning and the sharing of context without scrutiny? We are in an age of context collapse, and students do not necessarily have opportunities to be raised in a faith-based environment. Teachers need to adopt a kind of religious curriculum that she calls "martyria," with witness, or testimony, at its heart—a curriculum in which there is a witness to a God kind of hope.

If we talk about witness and testimony, we need to talk about the trauma students have experienced related to the pandemic and the effects of injustices. We need to find spaces to listen to them and not minimize their experiences but, rather, say, "I see you, I hear you, I believe you" (Hess 2020, 223). These powerful words allow us to connect at a truly human level. Hess writes, "When we find ourselves in this place, when we open ourselves to what Parker Palmer has called the 'tragic gap' between what we imagine to be possible and what actually is around us, our hearts will be broken (Palmer, 2011, p. 191 and following)" (p 224).

Jesus found himself in this tragic gap when he went to hell after the crucifixion.[3] We and our students have all felt like Christ at times, and Christ shows us that it is all right to be vulnerable. As educators, we must make space for this kind of awareness in our teaching.

Conclusion

Hope offers educators a re-imagining of their context, a relationship between education and hope that is mutually beneficial and creates change. The temptation to fall into despair is inevitable, but it is possible to resist and find hope in our faith.

The need for religious global education is crucial and requires a reordering of society that offers hope in trauma-based settings (such as schools). To produce change, educators need to create a religious, shared context, with a new narrative in which faith-based pedagogies serve as a powerful resource that acknowledges current battles, removes the onus from educators and places trust in God. As Freire (1994, 8) writes, "To attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle, is tantamount to denying that struggle is one of its mainstays."

Notes

1. Matt 27:46 (New International Version [NIV]).
2. Matt 4:3 (NIV).
3. Matt 27:46 (NIV).

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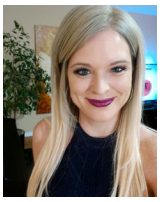

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A Bermuda-ful Gift: A Reflection on Teaching Abroad

Chris Ferguson

June 25, 2021, was like every late-June day I have experienced in the past 17 years—attending year-end meetings, cleaning my classroom, impatiently struggling through the last days of the school year, finalizing marks and getting excited about the summer adventures ahead of me.

Late that evening, family in bed, I was trying to unwind and found myself scrolling through social media. A post from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education caught my eye. It was an advertisement for a teaching position in Bermuda. Not just any position—a position perfect for me. The lyrics of the Beach Boys' "Kokomo" began to run through my head. Speaking of pretty mamas, at the breakfast table the next morning, I told my wife about this job opportunity, and her eyes lit up. Without any words exchanged, I knew what she wanted to do.

Perspective is an interesting thing, and this adventure in Bermuda has changed mine.

I invite you now to join me in my Time Accelerator: *Submit my resumé. Attend the job interview. Receive a job offer. Nervously consider the what-ifs. Coach a Little League baseball game. Ask Edmonton Catholic Schools for a leave. Receive permission for the leave. Accept the job.*

By then, it was only June 27, but all the decisions made in those two days felt like months of deliberation.

After a busy summer figuring out the logistics of our move, we landed in beautiful Bermuda on August 20. With its pink sand and blue water, you could see why Mark Twain wrote in a letter, "You go to heaven if you want to—I'd druther stay here" (Wallace 2020). In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, 1,246 kilometres from New York City, and with a tiny footprint of 53 square kilometres, Bermuda is a little slice of heaven here on earth.

Although I could talk all day about the food, beaches and people of Bermuda, I want to share my experience of teaching there. Mount Saint Agnes Academy (MSA) is a school of 400 students, K–12, started in 1890 by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul (Halifax, Nova Scotia). Today, the school uses the Alberta curriculum. For the 2021/22 school year, MSA was a home not only to me, teaching high school physics and math, but also to my two sons, in Grades 5 and 8. Whether surrounded by canola fields or by palm trees, schools are schools. (However, in Bermuda snow days are replaced with tropical storm days.)

Let's once again voyage in my Time Accelerator: *Staff meetings. Course outlines. Printing. Teaching. Marking. Laughs. Coaching. PD days. Exams. Year-end meetings. Classroom cleaning. Finishing up marks. Growing excitement about summer adventures.*

It was June again, but now it was 2022. A year had passed since that fateful late-night social media post that set our family on an adventure.

Reading this, you have learned what so far? Bermuda is beautiful, and schools are schools. Right now you may be wishing you had a Time Rewinder (rather than a Time Accelerator), so that you could gain back

the time you have spent reading this article. But may I suggest that you don't need either?

Here is my takeaway from this adventure of teaching in another country. The present moment is all you need. No need to rewind or accelerate time as "you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."[1] Some people like change. Some people like consistency. Some people dream of beaches. Some people dream of snow-covered mountains. Yet it all vanishes.

Perspective is an interesting thing, and this adventure in Bermuda has changed mine. The past few years have been really hard for teachers, and looking back at how the pandemic changed our lives and our work, we share a collective trauma. The future doesn't look great either—the curriculum, funding, pensions, inflation and collective agreements are all challenges facing our profession. These strong pulls to the past and the future, unfortunately, make us forget about the present. I have been given the gift of living in the present because of the very real reminder of being in a new and beautiful place. That mindset has permeated how I see teaching, too. Living in the moment, blessed to work with young minds and amazing colleagues, I am reminded of the gift we all have in being teachers.

"What is your life?" For teachers, life is living in the presence of the joy of our students. Like "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes," we will disappear from their lives but will never be forgotten. This can be said about my time in Bermuda as well.

Note

1. James 4:14 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition [NRSV-CE]).

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Chris Ferguson is a teacher-chaplain at Archbishop MacDonald High School, in Edmonton, and also teaches high school physics. Whether he is in the religious education classroom or the physics classroom, he is at home, as both environments bring him closer to God.

Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

Summer Break and Eucharistic Remembrance

Michelle Langlois

Warm and sunny days, blooming flowers, green grass. Summer has arrived!

As I write, another sure sign of the season is seen in Edmonton's schools: students vibrating with excess energy and pushing back against every rule on their way to two months of freedom from classrooms and books. The end of the school year is nearly here, and social media abounds with memes comparing the vibrancy of educators in September with their exhausted, hollow shells in June. As the natural world springs to life around us, educators are limping to the end of another trying year during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This time of year involves saying many goodbyes.

This time of year involves saying many goodbyes, especially to the oldest students at our sites. For the first time in three years, we were able to celebrate Grade 9 farewell in person at our junior high school. The evening included a Mass for staff, students and their families.

Celebrating the Eucharist in a gymnasium with the school community is a powerful experience. Looking around the room, I could identify students I've known for years and students I've never had the opportunity to work with. Family members from many cultures and backgrounds attended. Our population included Christians and people of no religious background. As the priest consecrated the Communion bread and murmured the familiar words of the Mass, I was moved by the reminder that I was seeing the Body of Christ in all its diversity and beauty in that plain space. As a group, we were flawed and ordinary and sacred.

During the consecration, the priest repeated, "Do this in memory of me"—Jesus's words from the meal he shared with his disciples before his death.[1] In this phrase and the mystery of the Eucharist are many deeply theological layers of meaning, but I wonder if there isn't also a sense of personal longing. After his three years of ministry, after all the hours spent building relationships and healing the sick, after the endless days of travel around the region, did Jesus reflect upon what he had hoped to accomplish through his obedience to God? Did he wonder if his friends would pass on the stories he had shared with them, or if he had really made a difference at all?

As we say our goodbyes to those moving on from our schools, what will we remember of them?

As we say our goodbyes to those moving on from our schools, what will we remember of them? Are there moments of hilarity that have left a lasting memory? Maybe eye-catching masterpieces gifted to us by aspiring artists? Have there been episodes of tragedy this year that will spark bittersweet thoughts within us in the years to come? Whatever the case, these are the pieces of people we've loved, pieces they will leave behind, consciously or not, that will enable them to remain a part of our lives.

These are the eucharistic ways that students and colleagues have given of themselves—the stories that will continue to influence our behaviour, the material items that will stir our awareness each time our eyes settle on them or our hands touch them.

I am one of those members of the school community who are saying farewell this month, as I, too, will move on to new opportunities in September. As I pack up my classroom, watching the shelves and walls become more and more bare, I wonder whether or not God has been able to use me—flawed, ordinary and sacred—to make any meaningful difference here. Will students remember me and repeat my stories? What will colleagues do and say in memory of me? What pieces of myself do I leave behind?

May we continue to deepen in our understanding and experience of the beauty and wisdom the Eucharist offers in the ordinary moments of our lives. May we recognize how we are touched by others and, in turn, touch others. May we recognize and celebrate how God touches us through our encounters, relationships and prayer.

Note

1. Luke 22:19.

Michelle Langlois is a religious sister with the Faithful Companions of Jesus. She teaches at St Thomas More Catholic Junior High School, in Edmonton, and is involved in vocations work with the Vocations Awareness Committee of the Archdiocese of Edmonton. She enjoys walking outdoors in any season, baking and road trips across our beautiful country.

Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

Finding Joy in Difficult Times

Mike Landry

I've been very impressed with *The Chosen*, a multi-season TV drama based on the life of Jesus, available from Angel Studios. While the show is not a replacement for reading Scripture, I've found it to be a beautiful interpretation of the gospel stories.

One thing that has stood out for me is Jonathan Roumie's compelling portrayal of Jesus. Roumie, whose own faith inspires his work on the show, presents Jesus as being kind, compassionate and deliberate in his actions and as having a great sense of humour. He also exemplifies the joy that we should expect to be the hallmark of every Christian life. Most of us can think of someone in our life—a priest, a religious sister or even a grandparent—whose faith and joy have left a lasting impression on us. Saint Paul told us to "rejoice always,"[1] and G K Chesterton (1908) wrote that "joy . . . is the gigantic secret of the Christian."

This is not to say that being Christian guarantees us easy and prosperous lives. The opposite is often true. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that "the way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle" (Catholic Church 2000, para 2015). But no matter the suffering we face—and many of our most heroic saints have endured great suffering—we firmly believe that both the life of faith and its end goal (heaven) are worth whatever this life demands of us.

Let's be realistic, though. Being told to rejoice always and that things will get better in heaven doesn't make the spiritual battle easy. Many people struggle to reconcile how a good and loving God can allow us to suffer, and I'd suggest C S Lewis's (2015) excellent book *The Problem of Pain* as a good place to start looking at that struggle. But a second issue can come up. We can be people of faith who believe in a loving God and trust that heaven will be worth all that we suffer here—but it's still hard to find joy in difficult times. With regard to that second issue, I suggest adopting three simple habits that will help us find joy when we suffer.

The first habit we should adopt is a habit of prayer. While Saint Paul calls us to pray at all times,[2] we will never be able to pray at all times if we don't pray at specific times. Cardinal Vincent Nichols says that "a sound practice of daily prayer is essential for our well-being" (Arco 2009). Keep in mind that the God we encounter in prayer is a God who understands suffering more than most of us imagine, and while praying every day allows us to vent our frustrations about whatever we may be going through at the time, it's also an opportunity to plug in to the grace of God. Setting aside a few minutes in silence to talk to (and listen to) God is an important daily habit to help us find joy.

Second, we need to learn to see the bigger picture. Many of us love watching sports, whether junior sports, professional sports or the Olympics. You might notice that elite athletes train, struggle, sacrifice and persevere—despite great difficulty—simply for the chance to play or compete. As part of this preparation, they spend a lot of time considering their goal of competing on the world stage, which helps them keep everything else they do in perspective. We would benefit from a similar practice: taking time to contemplate what we believe about heaven. We might

read passages from Scripture that talk to us about heaven, or the writing of a scholar or theologian who has some insights into heaven. As we start to see heaven as more than an abstract concept, we become more like elite athletes, seeing that ultimate goal as the reason we train, struggle, sacrifice and persevere through our own difficulties.

A third habit to consider is that of being childlike. The only saint that Saint John Paul II recognized as a Doctor of the Church—a title for one whose teaching is beneficial to everyone—was Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. This young French nun embraced Jesus's command that we "become like children,"[3] and she lived it beautifully, leaving us an example of what it means to live and love with one's whole heart. In imitation of Saint Thérèse, we might ask ourselves what it is that little children understand that we may have forgotten. Children laugh often. Children don't take themselves too seriously. Children recognize the beauty of a moment and don't worry about what's to come. When we look for ways to be more childlike, embracing the best qualities of little children, we open ourselves up to discover more joy in our own lives.

We are meant to be people of joy. Both the saints of the early church and more recent saints (such as Saint John Paul II and Mother Teresa) understood this implicitly. Pope Francis reminds us that "the Saints were not superhuman. They were people who loved God in their hearts, and who shared this joy with others."[4] As we choose to develop within ourselves a more consistent habit of prayer, as we look to the bigger picture and try to better understand what heaven is like, or as we find ways to live a more childlike life, we are likely to discover that joy comes more easily.

Notes

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition [NRSV-CE]).

2. Ephesians 6:18 (NRSV-CE).

3. Matthew 18:3 (NRSV-CE).

4. Pope Francis (@Pontifex), Twitter, November 19, 2013, https://twitter.com/pontifex/status/402803391065100289?lang=en (accessed October 24, 2022).

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Brave Teacher Conference

Mariette Dobrowolski

On May 13 and 14, 2022, teachers gathered at the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel in Calgary to reflect on the cost of courage and the call to hope. We engaged in critical conversations about moral courage and the impact of leading as teachers during times of conflict and crisis. Led by our distinguished speakers—including General Roméo Dallaire, Suzette Brémault-Phillips, PhD, and Dr Eric Vermetten—we explored the challenges we have faced not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also more broadly as frontline professionals in the field of education.

During times of crisis, teachers are often expected to keep a brave face while we take on the anxiety of our students and communities. We may feel like we don't have the right to feel grief over the losses we're experiencing alongside our students. In addition, our shifting roles in response to various crises can add to our burdens and deplete our energy. A German proverb states, "If you would have the lamp burn, you must pour oil into it." The goal of this conference was to refill our lamps, with the help of world-renowned researchers in trauma recovery and building resilience. Listening to research on how to create transformative change to strengthen our moral courage and to support our colleagues in doing likewise was time well spent.

On Friday, our event was opened by Elder Wanda First Rider, an Indigenous Elder in the Calgary Catholic School District and a member of the Indigenous Advisory Circle to the Alberta Teachers' Association. She shared her wisdom and insights as an Elder and a Knowledge Keeper and led us in a smudge as we created the space to reflect on the challenges and how we are called to be a presence of hope and healing in our classrooms and communities.

Friday also included an opening presentation from specialists in the field of trauma and recovery: Brémault-Phillips, a professor in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Alberta, and Vermetten, a clinical psychiatrist and colonel from Leiden University, in the Netherlands, who specializes in the field of stress, trauma, complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), neuroscience and moral injury. In tandem, they invited us to reflect on the stressors and mechanisms we've used as we've journeyed through the past few years. Reflecting on our current landscape and the toll it has taken validated those in the room, invited us to reflect on the variety of experiences professionals have faced, and helped us identify immediate and future needs.

To begin Saturday, we heard from General Dallaire and his wife Marie-Claude Michaud. Dallaire spoke of the "grand strategic inner self" and the need for a fundamental respect for the dignity of all. He reflected on the stigma of mental health and our role in destigmatization. He reminded us that while we feel a sense of urgency in supporting physical health, we are also called to support the walking wounded, as those who have stood for justice and supported the most vulnerable, making difficult decisions and sacrifices to do so, have experienced lasting impacts. Along with therapy, medication and medical intervention, peer support and the power of love are essential to providing the necessary prosthesis to live with injury. Taking up our role as active listeners and engaged companions draws both ourselves and others

out of isolation and into a space in which we can evolve together as communities. Listening, showing empathy and walking together ensure that no one is left behind but, rather, everyone is supported. Dallaire reminded us that we are all vulnerable but also that we are all resilient. In the question-and-answer period, teachers shared their experiences, insights and personal reflections, supported by Dallaire's responses and his grand salute to teachers and their families for the essential work they do.

General Roméo Dallaire

That afternoon was an opportunity for table talk and an eye to the future as Brémault-Phillips and Vermetten explored current and future research, protocols, treatments and supports that are providing valuable interventions. They reminded us of the value of relationships and the essential role teachers play in supporting upcoming generations.

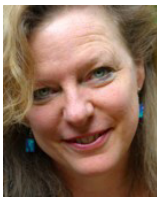
The Brave Teacher Conference was a unique offering, a collaborative effort cosponsored by the Social Studies Council and RMEC, with further support from the Novus Foundation. We thank our keynote speakers and all those on our councils who helped out, as well as those who attended.

Stay tuned for more. We've only just begun!

RMEC executive with the keynote speakers

Elder Wanda First Rider accepting a gift

Dr Eric Vermetten and Suzette Brémault-Phillips, PhD



Mariette Dobrowolski holds a master of arts in theology and has served as a teacher-chaplain with the Calgary Catholic School District, as well as teaching religion, English language arts and diverse learning. She now teaches at St Timothy Junior/Senior High School, in Cochrane. She is the cofounder and director of Sanctum Retreat, a spiritual retreat space that serves faith communities, as well as education, health care and social services.

Book Review

The New Evangelisation: Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools

by Richard M Rymarz

Modotti Press, 2012

Reviewed by Maria Sander

Richard M Rymarz's book *The New Evangelisation: Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools* is surprisingly not just for those who work in Catholic schools. I believe that it has a message for all faithful Catholics. However, certain applications in the book are specific to those who work in Catholic schools, so I would especially recommend the book to those people.

The author is the head of religious education and director of research at the Australian Institute of Theological Education. However, he is no stranger to Alberta. He is a former professor of religious education at St Joseph's College, in Edmonton, and has dozens of publications on the topic of Catholic education.

This book discusses the new evangelization, which was popularized by Saint Pope John Paul II. If you are unfamiliar with this concept, the new evangelization involves evangelizing not to people who have never heard the Gospel but, rather, to fallen-away Catholics.

Rymarz's preface explains how he came up with the concept of the book. He shares his observations about students' lack of involvement in the Catholic student club at the university he attended. Based on national demographics, he would have estimated that approximately 5,000 Catholic students were enrolled at the university, but the Catholic student club had only 30 members. After graduating, he hoped to do some research on Catholic university students, but he found it hard to find many. This led to his interest in the new evangelization, especially as it pertains to Catholic schools.

The first chapter—"John Paul II and the 'New Evangelisation'"—describes what the new evangelization is, including citations from apostolic exhortations by Saint Pope John Paul II.

Where things get really interesting is chapter 2, "The Dawn of a New Era: Post-Conciliar Generations and the New Cultural Landscape." The council Rymarz is referring to is the Second Vatican Council, and the postconciliar generations are Generation X and Generation Y (also known as millennials). As a millennial myself, I've come to find over the years that I was poorly catechized, as many of my peers also admit. Rymarz notes that this also happened with the generation before mine. These are the people who are currently not only working in Catholic schools but also raising the next generation of Catholics. If students are being raised both at school and at home by people who were poorly catechized and who have not made

efforts to remedy this, the problem will continue. Rymarz shares societal reasons for the poor catechism of these generations, including what happened in Catholic schools in the 1970s.

The third chapter is called "The Social Context for the New Evangelisation: Three Theoretical Perspectives." In this brief chapter, Rymarz shares some features and challenges of our society as they pertain to religious education. The challenges are fleshed out in the following chapter, "Some Perceived Difficulties with the New Evangelisation."

Finally, if you do not have time to read the book in its entirety, at least read the fifth and final chapter, "Some Principles of the New Evangelisation for Catholic Schools." Whereas the previous four chapters explained the why, this one explains the how. Some of Rymarz's recommendations are out of the hands of teachers—for example, the recruitment practices to ensure that the staff who are hired are witnesses of the faith. However, teachers can follow some of the recommendations—such as reaching out to parents and celebrating the distinctiveness of our faith.

This book references many studies, which does make it a lofty read rather than an easy, read-it-in-an-afternoon sort of book, but it has valid points for all Catholic school staff. Rymarz is based in Australia, so Albertan readers may find some of his descriptions of Catholic schools unfamiliar. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book to those who work in Catholic schools, whether teachers, educational assistants, principals or superintendents.

Maria Sander has been a Catholic elementary school teacher since 2016, beginning with a practicum in the Calgary Catholic School District in her final year of university. There, she found that Catholic education was not only her dream job but her vocation. After a year of working in Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools, where she was inspired by her colleagues' creative methods of faith permeation, she returned to the Calgary Catholic School District. She currently teaches kindergarten at St Jude School, in Calgary. She is also completing the online master of religious education program through Newman Theological College. She uses writing as a means of evangelization and is involved in faith formation.

Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

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- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

OP-DP-64 2021 03

The Alberta Teachers' Association

ISSN 2560-6093