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joy
reverence
courage
kindness
freedom
passion
friend
spirit
peace
discipline
respect
believer
reason
faith
humility
compassion

fully
alive

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NEWSJOURNAL OF THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION COUNCIL



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From the President



For the second time in three years, the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) had to scramble at the last minute to find a speaker for the annual conference. In 2014, we were notified just hours before the conference that our presenter had passport issues and was unable to come to Canada. This

year, we were informed just a few days before the conference that our scheduled speaker, the world-renowned Father Thomas Rosica, had fallen ill and, for the first time in his career, would have to miss a speaking engagement.

We said some prayers and then put our heads together. When the dust settled, we were blessed to have secured speakers André Regnier, founder of Catholic Christian Outreach, and Ken Yasinski, founder of FacetoFace Ministries. Both were well received and were a great part of an extremely successful conference.

This situation served as a reminder that we are not in total control of our lives but, rather, we must remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Even though we had

made all the necessary arrangements, in the end we were forced to rely on God to rescue us from our predicament.

At RMEC's annual general meeting, I heard the prompting of the Holy Spirit again as the outgoing president put my name forward to be the next president. I was then asked if I would let my name stand. I paused, as I did not have any aspirations to be president and was quite content to continue in my position as webmaster. After a moment, though, I accepted, as I understood that sometimes God nudges us out of our comfortable places when he has more in store for us. I am honoured that the membership of RMEC has looked my way for their president. Perhaps we all need to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit to see where we are being called.

My first president's message would not be complete without a recognition of our outgoing president, Carl Fakeley. His great work over his four-year term can be measured in many ways, but one that speaks loudly is the 76 per cent increase in our membership during his term. I look forward to Carl's continued contributions, as past president, as he guides the council with his wisdom.

Dan McLaughlin

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.

A Note from the Editor



I have heard it said that it is not happy people who are grateful but, rather, it is grateful people who are happy. If that is true, then I am a very happy man, for it is with immense gratitude that I see this first issue of *Fully Alive* come to fruition.

First of all, I am thankful for the council's confidence in allowing me to take on the position of editor. Since I started teaching in 1999, I have witnessed and learned much on my adventures, but nothing could have prepared me for the learning that compiling this issue of the journal had in store for me. I am ever grateful for the mentorship of my predecessor, Dorothy Burns, who held this position for 13 years. It is only because of her confidence, guidance and help that this torch she passed on to me wasn't dropped!

It is both an honour and a privilege to be part of RMEC. As one of our members once said, "RMEC is a small but

mighty council." I couldn't agree more! I cannot think of any jobs quite so uniquely crucial to this age we live in as those held by religious and moral educators throughout this fine province. It is RMEC's hope, as we learn how to better serve our members, that our council will continue to grow and to extend a limb of support into the classrooms of every faith educator possible. If you or someone you know would like to contribute to the health of future issues of *Fully Alive*, please see the submission guidelines on the inside back cover.

Though it is only my first, I am excited about this issue of *Fully Alive*. You will find articles by authors who hold a wide variety of posts—classroom teachers, the founder of a movement and even an attaché of the Holy See Press Office. I hope you will take the time to read each piece and will be able to take away something that makes you feel challenged, stronger and more optimistic about the adventurous field you serve in.

Dean Schneider

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Meet Your RMEC Executive 2016/17



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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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True Power in Teaching

Father Clair Watrin

What gives power to your teaching and what will help your students the most in their future lives? To see what is important in a teacher, let us start by thinking about our own experience as students.

Which teachers had the greatest impact on you? Were the things you learned academically what you remember and what helped you most? What did you receive from your teacher that had the greatest impact on you?

My own experience is that it was not the knowledge I learned but, rather, the kindness and love and care of my teachers that made the greatest impact on my life. There were some teachers whom I admired for their love, and they inspired me because of the love of God within them.

I was a teacher and a guidance counsellor for many years in various high schools. When I see students whom I taught years ago, what do they still remember as being important and helpful? More than the content of what I taught, it was my example and how I related to them when teaching—my respect and love and care.

I have talked to my students who are now parents of children in school. They share with me how the kindness and compassion of a teacher can change a student's life. I have known of students who seemed to be hopeless failures until a teacher saw Jesus in them and took time to encourage and care for them. It was like they became completely different people. They were no longer hopeless but, rather, were able to see the good in themselves and have a positive outlook on life. It was a miraculous change.

What can a teacher do that cannot be done by a computer? Many students do their whole schooling by computer and get top marks. A blind student can learn just by listening to a computer and often does better than those who can see a teacher in front of them. The

computer can even provide well-researched answers to a student's questions.

What can a teacher do? I believe that the teacher can provide the most important element in the whole task of education. It is something that no computer can do. The teacher, as a spiritual being, can be a channel through which the wisdom and love of God can flow. In the loving, caring communication and interaction between two people, there is a deeper communication with the Persons of the Blessed Trinity—for each person is made in the image of God.

Teachers who love and care for their students have a lasting impact on students' lives. Teachers who are prayerful and in union with God, and who have the love of God within them, have an even greater impact on their students. The light of Christ shines forth from them.

Think of Mother Teresa (now Saint Teresa) of Calcutta. Because she relied on God and trusted in his grace and power, she taught the whole world about love and compassion and about the dignity and value of each person. People have told me that to talk with her for just a few minutes was to have a deep experience of the love and healing going out from her.

In my own ministry as a high school teacher, I finally learned to ask myself, *Where is the power? Is it in me and my skill as a teacher, or is it in God?*

I finally started to pray more. I started to rely more on the grace of God to help and motivate my students, to guide me in my efforts to inspire them.

When we think about our goals as teachers and what success in our teaching really is, we must not look only at the visible. The spiritual world is very real and powerful. God is the ultimate source of all knowledge and wisdom. Teachers who pray for their students have the power of God working through them.

I have been told that a secular study was conducted on medical doctors after reports of inexplicable healing. These stories attributed the healing to God answering the prayers of doctors. The study aimed to see if prayer had an observable impact. The results showed that doctors who had deep faith in God and who prayed for their patients had significantly greater success in giving them healing and health. There was even evidence of healing among their patients that could not be explained by medical science. I have also heard reports of inexplicable healing through prayer in my conversations with various chaplains at hospitals.

There is a danger that the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), given to the church by Jesus to go forth and teach all nations, has been forgotten. We often seem to be just teaching our students what they need to know in order to be successful in this world and to gain material wealth so that they will not end up in poverty, as those who have no education often do. Our commission, though, is meant to be far more.

We have a great call from God to share his plan, to mould each student to be another Christ. To be a teacher in a school of faith is a great and wondrous call. As Scripture says, “Those who instruct others into righteousness will shine like the stars in heaven forever” (Daniel 12:3).

Those who are critical of their own love or prayerfulness in the classroom might feel discouraged at this point. With them, I share this: few of my teachers were inspiring, but God in his mercy still used them to bless me. Just having teachers who said a prayer before class and taught me the truths of faith gave me grace and knowledge that led me to faith, to my vocation as a priest and to eternal life. It is very important, in our failures and weakness, that we trust God’s ability to use us anyway, to bless our students and give them the gift of faith and eternal life.

When we see how we have fallen short and when we do not see any growth in the hearts of our students, let us trust in the Lord to use us nevertheless. Pray now for his grace to heal our past failures and to still use what we

taught our students to bring more growth in faith. As we pray, he can redeem the past and bring good out of it.

When I started out as a teacher, I was fearful and lacking in prayer and holiness—certainly not an inspiring example to my students. God in his mercy still used me to bless them to some degree. Now, as I pray more for my students and trust more in God’s power rather than my own ability, his grace is able to flow through me more powerfully and even redeem my past shortcomings.

By the grace of God, I learned to start anew each day and try to grow myself, so that I could be a greater light for my students in the future. Even now, when I am no longer teaching, I still pray for my former students, and I know and trust that the Lord will redeem the failures of the past.

I still have contact with some of my students, and even those I hurt are now good friends and have come to be strong in their faith and love of God. Some are now teachers or retired teachers themselves, and we talk about the “good old days” when I taught them.

To sum up in very few words, teaching youth is a great and beautiful call from God. Rejoice that you have answered this call. Face your shortcomings, but do not be discouraged. Start afresh and try to do a little better each day.

Pray and trust more in God’s power and mercy. As you make progress, growing in faith and love, God will be able to use you in greater and greater ways.



Father Clair Watrin, CSB, was ordained in 1959 to the Congregation of St Basil. As a Basilian, he has served in many roles and locations, including parish work, many years as a teacher (secondary and postsecondary) and 15 years as a missionary in Saint Lucia (an island country in the Caribbean). He is the founder of the Live-In retreat movement, helped establish Catholic Christian Outreach at the University of Saskatchewan (the movement has now spread to campuses across Canada) and served most recently as chaplain at the Way of Holiness retreat centre in Hinton. He is now retired and living at the Cardinal Flahiff Basilian Centre in Toronto.

Laudato Si': A Call to Conversion of Mind, Heart and Lifestyle

Father Thomas Rosica

There is a story within the story of *Laudato Si'*—Pope Francis's landmark encyclical letter on care for our common home.¹ The letter provides an overview of the environmental crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the dialogue about the environment has been framed mainly using political, scientific and economic language. Now, the language of faith has entered the discussion—clearly, decisively and systematically.

The encyclical is addressed to “every person living on this planet” (sec 3) and calls for a new way of looking at things. We face an urgent crisis, when the earth has begun to look more and more like, to use the pope's vivid image, “an immense pile of filth” (sec 21). This encyclical is deeply uncomfortable to read. The pope is not content simply to face up to the institutional and moral issues related to climate change and environmental degradation; he also addresses the deeper tragedy of humanity itself. Still, the document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, all of us can strive to change course. We can move toward an “ecological conversion” (sec 5) in which we can listen to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (sec 49).

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (sec 160). This question is at the heart of *Laudato Si'*. It “not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal” (sec 160). We must ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and the values

at the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? . . . What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” (sec 160). “Unless we struggle with these deeper issues,” says the pope, “I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results” (sec 160).

Laudato Si' is a privileged instrument of evangelization for today because it strives to answer the deeper questions

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*,
section 139

about ecology and the environment within God's revelation as found in his creation and the teachings of the Catholic Church. At this critical moment in history, what is at stake is not just our respect for biodiversity but our very survival. Scientists calculate that the most vulnerable and marginalized will be the most harmed by global warming in the future. The dignity and rights of human beings are intimately and integrally related to the beauty and the rights of the earth itself. After all, who will dare

to speak for the voiceless resources of our planet? Who will step up to protect the silent diversity of its species? Will our generation accept responsibility for pushing our environment over the tipping point?

Laudato Si' must be read not only as a work of Catholic social teaching but also as a great instrument of the first evangelization and the new evangelization, and as a witness to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Pope Francis's letter reflects a profound confidence and openness to the world. He draws on an ecumenical and interdisciplinary

range of authorities—scientists, saints, theologians, international agencies, other world religious leaders, previous popes, Catholic bishops conferences on every continent and even a Sufi mystic (in one of the footnotes).

Laudato Si' is a perfect example of how the Church, at its highest level, understands the modern world, enters into a profound dialogue with the world and repeats her age-old message of salvation in a new way.

With *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis is laying the groundwork for a new Christian humanism, rooted in the simple and beautiful image of Jesus that he presents for the world's consideration. For, in the end, it is in the name and mission of Jesus of Nazareth that the pope issues his call to conversion—a compelling invitation to each of us to look at the earth and all of its creatures with the loving eyes and heart of Jesus Christ. This is clearly a first evangelization for those who may be encountering Jesus for the first time, and a new evangelization or wake-up call for those who once knew Jesus but grew distant from him.

To counter those who may argue that a papal encyclical on the environment has no real authority, Pope Francis explicitly states that *Laudato Si'* “is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching” (sec 15). It continues the Church's reflection on modern-day problems that began with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, on capital and labour, published in 1891.²

Laudato Si' takes a systematic approach to the problem. First, the pope links all human beings to creation: “We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (sec 139). But our decisions have an inevitable effect on the environment: a blind pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalized is connected to the ruination of the planet.

Pope Francis does not try to prove anything about climate change. Rather, his encyclical accepts the best scientific research available today and builds on it. Thus, *Laudato Si'* draws on both Church teaching and findings from other fields to help modern-day people reflect on this current crisis.

The heart of what the encyclical proposes is integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice, an ecology that “respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (sec 15). In fact, “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from

ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live” (sec 139). This is true as we become involved in various fields: in economy and politics, in different cultures (particularly those most threatened), and even in every moment of our daily lives.

This integral perspective also brings the ecology of institutions into play: “If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life” (sec 142). As Pope Benedict XVI noted, in *Caritas in Veritate*, his encyclical letter on integral human development in charity and truth, “every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (sec 51).³

Using many concrete examples, Pope Francis confirms his thinking that “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves” (sec 141). He asserts, “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (sec 139).

Human ecology is “inseparable from the notion of the common good” (sec 156) but is to be understood in a concrete way. In today's context, in which “injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable” (sec 158), committing oneself to the common good means making choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (sec 158). This is also the best way to leave a sustainable world for future generations, not just by proclaiming but also by committing to care for the poor of today, as already emphasized by Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2010 message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace: “In addition to a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of *intragenerational solidarity*” (sec 8).⁴

Integral ecology also involves everyday life. The encyclical gives specific attention to the urban environment. Human beings have a great capacity for adaptation, and “an admirable creativity and generosity is shown by persons and groups who respond to environmental limitations by alleviating the adverse effects of their surroundings and learning to orient their lives amid disorder and

*An integral ecology
is inseparable from the
notion of the
common good.*

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*,
section 156

uncertainty” (sec 148). Nevertheless, authentic development presupposes an integral improvement in the quality of human life: public space, housing, transport and so on.

Also, “the acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation” (sec 155).

Dialogue and Openness

The earth is paying the price for our selfishness. Purely technological responses to the ecological crisis do not get to the heart of the problem, which can be addressed only through our moral and spiritual conversion. For Pope Francis, central to this conversion is dialogue with both human and nonhuman creatures.

Dialogue cannot take place from a position of insularity; it requires radical and generous openness to the other that is born from and that leads to a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. This dialogue is rooted not in a “light-hearted superficiality” (sec 229) but, rather, in a willingness to be truly attentive to the other to such a degree that love for the other characterizes our interactions.

Notes

1. Francis, *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed December 6, 2016).

2. Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* [Encyclical Letter on Capital and Labor], http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (accessed December 6, 2016).

3. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth], http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (accessed December 16, 2016).

4. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html (accessed December 16, 2016).



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First Things First

Mike Landry

The third habit of Stephen Covey's (2013) *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* talks about the need to “put first things first.” Looking back over my adult life—as a Christian, a husband, a father and a youth minister—I'd say that this has been one of my greatest areas of struggle. I think I've spent more than my fair share of time working on or worrying about the wrong things.

I've found it particularly easy to get sidetracked in my professional life. In my 10 years of parish youth ministry, I was always the youngest person on a parish staff—and, in most cases, the one with the most care and concern about technology. As a result, I put hours of work into parish websites, sound systems and computer workstations—and I was glad to do it (in fact, I usually asked for these responsibilities). The only problem was that every hour I put into these areas was an hour I wasn't spending with young people, preparing upcoming activities or generally building up the whole structure of our youth ministry.

Although working on a small staff means going above and beyond your job description, the fact remains that working in youth ministry (or for the Church in general) means that there is never enough time to get everything done.¹

But, looking back, misspent time is not the worst way I worried about the wrong things.

Luke's gospel tells us of an occasion when John came across an exorcist who was not one of Jesus's 12 but who was casting out demons—doing what the disciples had been called to do. Believing that this man was infringing on the disciples' exclusive work, John tried to stop him. Jesus's reply was succinct and to the point: “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:50). I imagine that this was a bit of a wake-up call for John, helping him look beyond himself to see not competitors

in the work of evangelization but potential allies. I don't believe he had bad intentions, just that he got a bit sidetracked and self-centred.

I can think of far too many moments when I was just like John. Moments when I let my ambition or pride get in the way of the big picture of ministry—helping to grow disciples.

One of the most notable of these moments began with the noblest of intentions. I saw that some of my young people needed something that would challenge their faith more deeply than our regular gatherings, so a group of us established a citywide evening of praise and worship/adoration. As a youth ministry event, it was incredibly successful: beyond consistent and growing attendance, we had young people discerning vocations to the priesthood and religious life, leaving for missionary years with NET Ministries. The event itself spawned several similar events in neighbouring parishes.

It was this last success that caused me all the trouble. I regarded these similar events as threats to my own event. I became defensive of the name and the format, and I resisted promoting the “competing” events at my own. After all, this had been *my* idea, it had grown because of *my* work, and it was supposed to be the lasting legacy of *my* ministry. And while my original motivation in starting these evenings had been good, as time wore on it became (at least in my own heart) more and more about me. Like John, I had started to believe that this was *my* exclusive work—and, like John, I needed a wake-up call to be snapped out of it.

It was in confession that I heard some haunting words that are most applicable here: “Would it not be a tragedy if young people came to me looking for Christ and found only me?” These words come to mind often when I struggle with prayer but also when I've been sidetracked, allowing things

to become too much about me and not enough about Christ. If Covey's third habit of putting first things first is important for Christians, it's doubly important for those of us engaged in religious education. When it comes down to it, we are trying to connect our students to a love story. The first and greatest commandment is that we are to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second is that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). But the beauty of it all is that God loved us *first* (1 John 4:19).

I'd be lying if I said I'm perfect at this today—it's a regular item on my examination of conscience. I know that when I'm doing ministry right, it is this love story that drives me. I am loved by God, and to return that love is to share it with anyone who will listen. But, like John, I'm easily distracted—not only by good things (such as trying to help anywhere that I can) but also (and much more dangerously) by a self-centred concern that makes me sweat far too much of the small stuff.

Do you ever find yourself distracted from the mission, or with your priorities mixed up? Where might God be challenging you to put first things first, both in your own life and in your classroom?

Note

1. See <http://projectym.com/finding-more-time-for-ministry/> (accessed December 19, 2016).

Reference

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Photo by James Baca. Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Denver.

*Give yourself fully to Jesus.
He will use you to accomplish
great things on the condition that
you believe much more in His love,
than in your weakness.*

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "Jesus Christ: He
Wants to Love with Our Hearts and
Serve with Our Hands,"
Tertium Millennium, March 1997

The Six Tasks of Catechesis, Part 1: Hold on to the Faith

Dorothy Burns

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.

—*General Directory for Catechesis*, section 80

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy 1997) is a Church document that offers guidance for the ministry of faith formation and offers theoretical and practical aspects about catechesis and its link to evangelization. Implicit in the words quoted above is the idea that faith is relational. Human beings are made for relationship. On the natural level, we know that the usual progression of a relationship unfolds something like this: an initial interest or attraction, followed by a growing bond as we learn more about each other and, eventually, a deeper commitment to friendship, or perhaps the lifelong commitment of marriage.

Our preliminary knowledge might be acquired through observation, which draws us to the other person in the first place, but as we get to know him or her through conversation and spending time together, the relationship either deepens and we grow in affection or love, or we decide that we do not want a deep relationship with the other person. If we choose to proceed, we find ways to express our affection or love. We learn that to maintain the relationship, we need to act in certain ways to avoid damaging the relationship. Finally, good communication will sustain a relationship over the long haul.

Our relationship with God is rooted in these same principles. The *General Directory for Catechesis* speaks of six interrelated catechetical tasks that help move us from initial conversion or adherence to the Lord to a solid and mature relationship (sec 80). These fundamental tasks are as follows: promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education,

moral formation, teaching to pray, education for community life and missionary initiation (secs 85–86).

This series of articles will discuss each of these tasks, and the acronym HELP ME will serve as a tool to help us remember them. In chapter 1 of his book *A Well-Built Faith*, Joe Paprocki (2008, xiii) uses the HELP acronym as a way to understand the four pillars of the Catholic faith as taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (the Creed, sacraments and liturgy, moral living, and prayer):

H = We *Hold* on to our faith that is revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition and is summarized in the Creed.

E = We *Express* our faith in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church.

L = We *Live* our faith according to Catholic morality.

P = We *Pray* our faith by maintaining a healthy prayer life.

ME was added to the acronym by Bill Smith (2016):

Mentor our faith—Apprenticeship in Christian living

Evangelize our faith—Promote a missionary spirit

Task 1: Promoting Knowledge of the Faith = Hold on to the Faith

There are many ways to come to know someone: through observation, through other people's observations or stories about the person, and through the person's self-revelation to us. Such knowledge helps us choose whether or not we want to *hold* on to that person in a relationship. As the relationship progresses, we move from knowing *about* the person to knowing the person.

Within Catholicism, the primary sources of knowledge about God are Sacred Tradition (as expounded upon primarily in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) and Sacred Scripture.

These record, in different ways, the encounters of individuals and the faith community with the mystery of God. They not only describe these encounters but also consider the ponderings of individuals and the community about the significance of the encounters and what God reveals to us through them about his own inner life and desire to have a relationship with us—“the divine plan” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, sec 85). The fullness of this revelation is God incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ. All of this knowledge of God is summarized in the Creed.

In Catholic schools, much of our time (particularly in religion class) is dedicated to promoting knowledge of the faith. By teaching key faith vocabulary words and sharing the history of salvation, as told in Sacred Scripture, we give students the language and world view of faith. In the Gospels, students meet Jesus and hear the proclamation of the Good News and the kingdom of God.

As we gain more knowledge, we can enter more deeply into a personal relationship with God and we are equipped to share the truth of God with others.

Next time, this column will explore Task 2: Liturgical Education.

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Dorothy Burns is the director of religious education for Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools. She has been on the advisory panel and a reviewer for Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ, a new religious education program being developed by Pearson Canada.

Summary Table

Acronym (HELP ME)	Task of Catechesis (from the <i>General Directory for Catechesis</i>)	Content
H Hold on to the faith	Promoting knowledge of the faith	God's self-revelation in Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture The Creed as the summary and profession of Catholic beliefs

The Teacher-Student

Michele Barrett

As an experienced teacher, I have had the honour of working with students across Alberta in a wide variety of social and cultural settings: tiny and isolated First Nations communities, northern Alberta towns, tough inner-city schools, city suburbs, middle-class neighbourhoods, southern Alberta farm communities and exclusive private schools.

One thing I can attest to is that kids are kids. A thread of commonality runs through all demographics of students, especially teenagers—the desire to discover who they really are, how they are special, where they belong and what they are meant to be in the future. This common thread gives religious education instructors a powerful and unique advantage because, in our subject area, we are called to assist students in finding the answers they are seeking.

Despite my varied teaching experiences, I do not possess some elusive magic formula for helping students answer all of these key life questions. No human being does. However, years spent in my vocation have taught me that listening to students helps me gain insight into fostering their spiritual growth. Therefore, I am concurrently a teacher and a student. In turn, my students teach me.

To discover what students need and want in an effective religious studies teacher, I interviewed 10 students and former students. They ranged in age from 11 to 23 years old and resided in Fort McMurray, Slave Lake, Edmonton, Calgary, Strathmore and Lethbridge. I grouped their comments into like themes. Coincidentally, I ended up with 10 categories. The descriptions below are not direct quotations from any one student but, rather, my best summation of what the students expressed to me. The limited scope of my interview sampling means that my findings would never qualify as a legitimate research paper. However, what this process did reveal are several striking themes related

to what some Alberta religious education students desire in their teachers.

The following themes emerged in response to the question, “As a student, what do you want and need in an effective religious studies teacher?”

Cares about the subject; is truly passionate about the Catholic faith

We know if you aren’t genuine; we can sniff out a phony in short order. Caring about the faith is overwhelmingly the most important quality in a religion teacher. Your excitement can be contagious. If you honestly don’t care about God and his role in your life, we will soon resign ourselves to hunkering down and suffering through your course as painlessly as possible. Being an expert theologian or having been trained in postsecondary is useful but not a prerequisite for being an effective religious studies teacher. The heart trumps the head in this subject area. Don’t be afraid to say, “Great question. I don’t know. Let me find out for you.” That shows us that you are also still learning and interested in discovering more. Passion and an authentic desire to get to know the Catholic faith yourself will always excite a class to do the same. The principle of inspiring your students is valuable in any subject area but especially in the potentially life-changing realm of religious studies. Do not waste this rare and precious opportunity to help us develop our spiritual lives and deepen our relationship with God.

Cares about me, the individual student; makes me feel important

As a young person, I am a complex conglomerate of feelings, opinions, desires, questions, worries and hopes. I need my religious education teachers to make the effort in

reaching out to me so that I know I matter to them. You will have to take the first steps before I will. Keep in mind that, depending on my personal life situation, I may not have the strength to meet you halfway, even if I want to. You have the incredible potential to be the most influential teacher in my entire junior and senior high school experience.

Creates a trusting classroom environment

Trust in the classroom is difficult to build when we don't know our classmates. Even if we happen to know each other's last names and have been in a few classes together, we still know very little about each other, really. Building a trusting classroom environment takes time and deliberate effort; it will not happen on its own. Interstudent trust can also be hard when we know our classmates extremely well (perhaps too well). If we've grown up together, we know all the embarrassing things people did in earlier years. As the teacher and the facilitator of the lesson, please recognize that we are not the same as we were five years ago; we don't want to be viewed as our younger selves, and we have an inborn need to continually recreate ourselves. A gifted religious studies teacher can find the balance between supporting us and challenging us to build an environment of trust and openness. Building a genuine rapport and mutual respect is necessary for success in a religious studies classroom.

Creates a trusting relationship with me, personally

Your caring about me will enable me to trust you. As teenaged students, we become accustomed to connecting with many different teachers each school year. Strive to be that one special teacher who I know will have my back when things get rough. Be yourself. I respect a faulty, humble teacher more than an artificially perfect one whose so-called holiness is unattainable in my estimation. You may be the only person I see every day who believes in me. You may never know who among us clings to your every word and takes what you say deeply to heart.

Encourages student involvement in the lesson; doesn't just lecture

We desire good engagement, hoping that you'll accept our questions and, to the best of your ability, provide thorough and honest answers. As well, we ask that you be open to constructive and positive debate that leads to a clearer path to the truth. If you really listen to students' different views, you will make much more progress than you would by simply telling us what we should think and do. When you allow us to share without judging us, you

will get a better sense of who we are and where we're coming from. The lecture format gets boring quickly and will only encourage us to tune out and vegetate. Each of us wants to be heard. We need a platform to share our views on such important spiritual matters and to be supported and guided by you, our teacher. Listening to any person for 50 minutes straight is tedious and counterproductive to learning.

Helps us internally question why we each believe what we believe

With our wide range of beliefs, we are looking to you to be a type of compass for us. Keeping our class discussions at a surface level is certainly easier and less messy, but such discussions don't delve deep enough to help us change inside. Courageously address the deeper life questions to help us make paradigm shifts in the right direction, spiritually speaking. Isn't this the purpose of religious education classes? While Church history, the Bible, the pope and the lives of saints are part of the curriculum and valuable to study, we crave the safe opportunities you can provide for us to transform ourselves from the inside out. Realize that, today, kids grow up more quickly than you did; trust that we can handle the serious stuff. Be not afraid.

Allows us to more often choose our own partners or groups for discussion

It's impossible to be honest and open with classmates we dislike or don't trust. No true dialogue is going to occur when a teacher groups us with classmates we aren't emotionally close to. There's nothing worse than being forced into pairs to discuss personal opinions that could be used against us outside the safe confines of your classroom. We're not willing to risk public shaming to participate in your assignment. Try to be sensitive to the current social climate between your students.

Offers personal openness about their own faith walk, including their struggles, without completely unloading their life

Be authentic, and make sure that the personal story you are sharing fits the topic being explored. If you are oversharing, that means you're probably focusing too much on yourself and ignoring us, your students. For some of us, it is difficult to relate to saints or other famous and inspirational people who lived so long ago because they existed in very different societies with challenges that may no longer exist. Today's world is unique, with new and different challenges. We might relate better to

someone we know personally, such as you. Your experiences in facing and overcoming your own spiritual struggles encourage us to face our own issues. We want to get to know you better, even though we may not show this desire outwardly.

Ensures that assignments are meaningful and varied, as religious studies class is not and cannot be delivered like most other subject areas

By nature, religious education is more subjective and personal. Create relevant activities that help us progress positively in our personal spiritual journeys. If you mark us based on how closely we align our answers with how you feel, this will alienate us. If we are trying and are participating in class, give us credit for it. Religious education should not be a checklist of mastering specific outcomes (like math or science class). Consider a higher frequency of assessment through shorter quizzes to keep the content narrower and the information more recent. Plan off-site religious retreats for us, with inspiring guest speakers, so that we can feel a broader appreciation and application of our Catholic beliefs at work outside of school. We understand that the development of our spirituality is nearly impossible to quantify in a letter grade or percentage point. Each of us is at a different spiritual level in our journeys, and our classroom work should respect that fact. Using different ways to present the content keeps it interesting and makes learning about the Catholic faith more enjoyable.

Doesn't expect students to answer every inquiry question

Just because I'm silent doesn't mean I'm not listening and thinking about the topic. If I'm required to answer aloud, I may be embarrassed or may give you an answer that isn't real or true. When forced, I'll tell you what I think you want to hear so that you'll move on to someone else. Sometimes I need to quietly reflect on what's being discussed, without intrusion. Those of us who are introverts need time to contemplate what you've presented to us, without being pressured to formulate a response immediately. Hasty answers can be easily misinterpreted.

As a teacher-student, what kind of religious studies instructor is God calling me to be? After interviewing 10 students and digesting their responses, I have concluded that I need to effectively meet the needs of my students wherever they are at, spiritually, in an open and honest manner. Teaching religious education is challenging because there is no one-size-fits-all approach, nor are any two students exactly alike. Just as God has created each student uniquely in his own image and likeness, so too has each teacher been blessed with distinct gifts and talents to be used in his or her vocation, with the ultimate goal of holiness and salvation for all.

Upon reflection, I see that I tend to attempt to lead and manage my classroom closely. My professional development and teaching experiences have trained me to be in control of classroom proceedings and to set and meet specific outcomes daily, within units and long-range plans. Successfully teaching religious education students requires that I follow the curriculum while also shifting the control from me to God. I need to openly trust in him to allow myself to be his hands and voice in today's diverse educational settings. As a professional teacher, I am privileged to be a vital part of my students' religious formation and development. This is a serious responsibility that will have far-reaching ramifications in the lives of thousands of young people for the rest of their lives. Being an effective religious educator requires me to be, at the same time, a humble student.

As in 2 Timothy 4:2, I charge you to preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient—correcting, reproofing, appealing—constantly teaching and never losing patience.



Michele Barrett's adventures as a teacher in Alberta schools began in 1988. Currently, she is a married mother of five amazing children, a home-schooling parent and an enthusiastic substitute teacher.

Richness, Beauty, Splendour and Glory: RMEC Conference 2016

Margaret Smerdely

The scheduled speaker for RMEC's Conference 2016, Father Thomas Rosica, fell ill suddenly, only days prior to the conference, and, sadly, could not attend. Despite this sudden change to the arrangements, Providence graced our time together with inspiring talks by André Regnier and Ken Yasinski.

André Regnier, founder of Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO), challenged all of us to relay the Gospel message to our students, boldly and leaving no space for indifference. Sin, he said, is what prevents us from proclaiming the Gospel, and sin reveals the nature of love because love requires a total self-giving whereas sin deprives. If we do not give our hearts totally to God, any indifference will distance us from our relationships with God and with others. Experiencing mercy through repentance allows for an active and conscious effort to draw closer to Christ, and transmits how much we need him.

Regnier emphasized that not only do our students need the message of the Gospel proclaimed to them but they need Christ himself—a personal encounter with him. Our students

need to not be mere spectators of a relationship with Christ; rather, they need to be living and actively engaged in a relationship with Christ, his power, his mercy and his salvation. Using the example of marriage, Regnier explained that love cries out for love and demands a total response with our words, with our lives.

The following day, Ken Yasinski, the founder of FacetoFace Ministries, wove his talks with similar threads: Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not a 99 per cent commitment to love hu-

manity but, rather, a 100 per cent, total self-giving act, and that invokes our 100 per cent response—a response that calls all of us to strive for sainthood. Sainthood is “now, here and for all!” *Discipleship* requires the same root word as *discipline*.

Yasinski underlined the tremendous power in knowing, loving and calling upon Jesus. Our longing for God, our longing for home, is fulfilled only when we enter into full communion with Christ. Until a fulfillment of true happiness is realized, we search for happiness and peace on this journey of life. Lastly, Yasinski outlined for us that we have the blessings and graces of the Eucharist, which deepen our union with the Lord, renew us and protect us from sin along this journey.

The richness of these talks, the beauty of the Rockies, the splendour of fellowship and the glory of prayer made this year's RMEC conference a truly blessed occasion. The conference concluded with a celebratory banquet that was full of laughter and song, tears of joy, and accolades of gratitude for the fruitful works being done throughout our province and in our council. As the weekend drew to a close, there was already a buzz of excitement in anticipation for next year's conference. Amen!

*Love makes no room
for indifference.*

—André Regnier



Student Teachers' Views

“Having the wonderful opportunity to attend the RMEC meeting this past weekend in Banff was both motivating and inspiring. I enjoyed meeting teachers from other cities in Alberta and sharing in fellowship. As we work towards a common goal of teaching and sharing Catholic values in our classrooms I will always remember ‘Do the next loving thing.’”

—Carol

“Having the opportunity to go to the [RMEC] conference was such a blessing. This conference opened my eyes to so much going on within myself. . . . Something that really stuck with me is how important decisions are. Faith in itself is a decision. It is not the encounter or experience you go through that makes you who you are, rather it is the decisions you make based on them.”

—Brittanie

“Attending the [RMEC] conference last weekend was inspiring to me as an individual and future teacher! RMEC not only had an amazing banquet but rejuvenated my spirit! Overall, attending the RMEC conference was a reminder that as a future teacher, I need to be courageous and passionate about my Faith not only in actions but in words, to directly share my Faith in the classroom whenever it is applicable, in order to show God’s great Love to my students.”

—Jasmine



Ken Yasinski



André Regnier



Margaret Smerdely has been a teacher and the dean of students at Clear Water Academy, in Calgary, for 15 years. She is also secretary of RMEC.

Vocation: Living God's Call Now

Mark DeJong

The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation already brings life to all living beings on the earth, how much more will the manifestation of the Father by the Word bring life to those who see God.

—Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.7

I have spent much of my life confused by the term *vocation*. In my early years, I assumed that it meant becoming a priest or a consecrated religious person. A prayer for vocations was recited at my local parish every Sunday, and it primarily focused on asking God for an increase of seminarians. I assumed that this was what a vocation was.

In high school, my religious studies teacher hosted a vocations day, during which nuns (Ursulines, if I recall correctly), priests and married people explained how they were “living God’s call.” From there, I took *vocation* to mean that three callings existed from which I could choose: married life, religious life or single life. When vocational schools came to my high school to advertise their programming, I assumed that, given the secular nature of those institutions, they were misusing the word *vocation* to inflate the importance of an occupation. Putting it all together, my line of thought was “I’ll have a career at some point, but my vocation will be _____” (fill in the blank with *single life*, *marriage* or *priesthood*).

Finally, in a moral theology course during my undergraduate program, I studied the term *vocation* in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a calling to “divine beatitude.” Though I am certain the professor was thorough in his explanation, I left that course believing that everyone’s actual calling was to be with God in heaven and

that to get there I would have to do a great job of living out my earthly vocation, which is actually the universal call to holiness.²

In methods of study and research, a common strategy is to reduce a subject into observable parts. This allows for clearer discernment of functions and behaviour. Difficulties in this process often occur when the researcher does not relate the findings back to the whole subject.

Imagine, for example, that a doctor is treating a patient for kidney disease, and the treatment requires an analysis of the kidney’s functions down to the cellular level. The doctor discovers the problem and brings the findings to the patient by saying, “We need to remove your kidney tomorrow. Have a good day.” Imagine the stress on the patient, who likely has a number of commitments and dependants, and is now facing a serious surgery. The doctor has forgotten that he or she is dealing with a person and not just a malfunctioning kidney.

Failure to acknowledge the patient’s stress would be a serious oversight for a doctor committed to maintaining the patient’s health. The same error has been committed with understandings of what a vocation is. The term *vocation* has been reduced to its parts rather than treated as a whole.

Misunderstanding of the term *vocation* results in confusion for the students we teach. Coupled with a culture that encourages us to withhold personal commitment until absolutely necessary, this misunderstanding of *vocation* has caused a great deal of misdirection, anxiety and even suspicion. All schools, therefore, have an obligation to develop clear and accurate language to dispel the immediate mistrust of and foster the enthusiastic pursuit of vocation by all students. Schools must clearly help students answer the question, “What is God calling me to do?”

So, What Is a Vocation?

Simply put, *vocation* means *calling*. Using broad strokes, the Catholic Church defines *vocation* as the call to “divine beatitude.”³ This means, effectively, living in happiness with God in heaven and here on earth. At first glance, this may seem a tall order, as the Church appears to be oversimplifying the key to a happy life. However, in fairness, the Church has always maintained that the meaning of life is to know, love and serve God and that doing so is the only way to be truly happy. It seems blindingly obvious that living in eternal happiness with God occurs once someone is in heaven; however, living this happiness immediately in our daily lives is not as clearly achievable.

The IPS Group (2014), of the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, has created a formulation of vocation as it pertains to the flourishing of the human person. This model is particularly useful in education, as it stresses the immediate importance of vocation for every person. Plainly stated, a person cannot be happy and flourish if that person is not living out his or her vocation. Accordingly, vocation is described as a three-level calling: (1) the call to holiness and goodness, (2) the call to relationship with others and (3) the call to work and service. If one of these is not developing, the person in question is “languishing” and the psychological impacts can be seen. These three levels are summarized as follows:

Vocation to Holiness. The common vocation to holiness is based upon the call in this world to a life of love of God and of neighbor as oneself, and to the life of good works, which God prepared beforehand, for each person to walk in (Lk 10:27; 1 Th 4:3; Ep 2:10). God gives to each a personal vocation that involves the unique and unrepeatable role God calls each person to play in carrying out the divine plan (2 Tm 1:9; LG n. 39).

States of Life. All people start life as single and may continue their lives as single in love and service to God and neighbor. Nonetheless, there are also committed vocations to a state in life, that is, to commit oneself to be married, ordained, or consecrated (religious). All these states involve collaboration in God’s work of sanctifying oneself and other people (1 P 5:1-4; LG, n. 41-43).

Work and Service. Through a third level of vocation, human persons engage in work and service, paid or not, that not only serves their personal flourishing and sanctification, but also contributes to the good of the family, other persons, and of the world (Gn 2:15; Mt 25:20). It is through such work that one can exercise the divine command to reach even beyond one’s friends and family to love one’s neighbor, to welcome the stranger, to exercise justice for the poor, and to do good to one’s enemy. (p 4)

The goal of introducing this multilevel approach to vocation is to demonstrate future implications for the field of education. Beginning with a focus on institutions and instruction, this column will in the future focus on specific levels of vocation and on helping students embrace and live their vocations here and now.

Notes

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1700, www.vatican.va/archive/ENGO015/_INDEX.HTM (accessed January 3, 2017).
2. Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], sec 39, November 21, 1964, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed January 3, 2017).
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Mark DeJong teaches at Notre Dame Collegiate, in High River, where he lives with his wife and three children. He graduated from the University of Alberta with a bachelor’s degree in education and is pursuing a master of science degree in psychology from Divine Mercy University in Arlington, Virginia.

Inaugural Wild West Catholic Youth Conference a Success

Tim Lasiuta

The smiles on the faces of the teenagers at the Wild West Catholic Youth Conference (WWCYC) told it all. After a weekend (September 30 to October 2) of instruction, inspiration and entertainment at the inaugural WWCYC, teenagers from across western Canada left Red Deer challenged to find the mission to which God has called them.

“I’m so blessed to be able to spend my life travelling the world doing [God’s] work,” said the energetic, impassioned and engaging keynote speaker, Father Tony Ricard, who describes himself as “a fool for God.” He ministers in New Orleans as a teacher, the pastor of his own parish and the Catholic chaplain for the New Orleans Saints football team.

Andrew Bright and Elijah Tadema, members of the Vancouver-based comedy team The Panic Squad, entertained attendees with their brand of family-friendly improvisational comedy and served as the masters of ceremonies on Friday and Saturday.



Father Tony Ricard

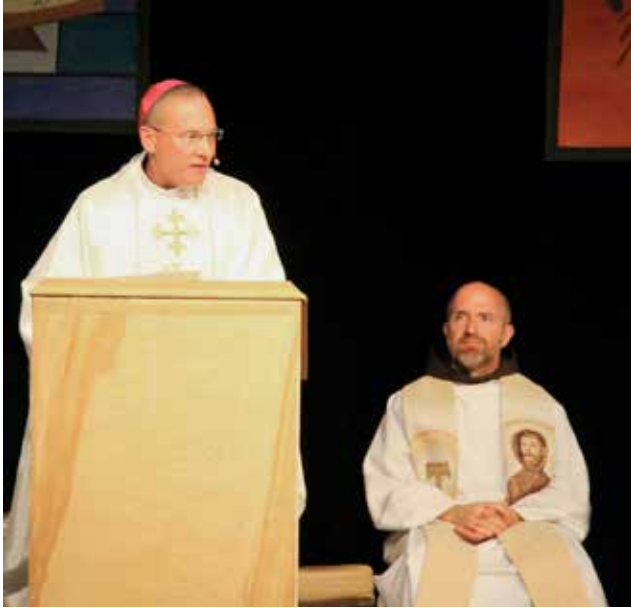


The Panic Squad

“It has been a great opportunity for the youth to get together socially and to learn about salvation through the Lord Jesus from gifted teachers,” said Bright.

Alayna and Karrah, two attendees, found the conference “a great way to connect with friends and learn at the same time,” in addition to “being comfortable in sharing [their] faith.” Karrah added that she was encouraged to invite her friends to attend Mass with her in the future.

“You have to remember that God made *you* for a reason,” said Father Tony as he had students exclaiming, “Whoomp, there it is,” when he said the word *boom* during a lesson on creation. “In the old days, we used to say that God don’t make junk. You, my friends, are not junk. You are God’s creation, and he loves you, the way you are.”



Friar Dan Gurnick and Bishop Gregory Bittman

In later sessions, Father Tony said that Christians have to put on the armour of God, much like football players wear protective gear during games. He also passed on his mama’s advice to remember who you are (in God) and to never be stupid (that is, don’t do what is wrong when you know what is right).

Not only the young people were inspired by Father Tony. Franciscan friar Dan Gurnick, of Cochrane, watched as the priest turned activities into teaching moments.

“As a priest, I am always looking for ways to reach young people, and watching [Father Tony] has taught me new methods to engage their attention in a lively way,” said Gurnick.

Programming during the weekend included live Stations of the Cross, confession, Mass on Saturday with Bishop Gregory Bittman and finishing Mass on Sunday with Archbishop Richard Smith. FaceToFace provided upbeat Christian music that had participants clapping and dancing.

“This is the way retreats and faith conferences are supposed to work,” said a member of FaceToFace.

Local musician Ashley McIntosh’s composition “Come In, Stay” was inspired by the theme of the conference—“Come! In! Stay!”

“Father Tom [Puslecki] asked me to write the theme song one day, and I told him that I had never done that before,” she remembered. “He told me he believed in me, and five minutes later, I had the song.”



FaceToFace

Throughout the weekend, various ministries gave presentations, as well as providing opportunities for the young people to interact and become part of their organizations. Bright and Tadema encouraged participants to tweet and Instagram their pictures and experiences with the hashtag #WWCYC16, as well as to write messages on the conference whiteboard.

Meanwhile, conference cofounder Father Tom Puslecki moved in and out of the activities and enthusiastically interacted with the youth.

“This has been an amazing weekend,” he commented on Sunday. “God is amazing.”

WWCYC was sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, the Alberta Catholic Teachers Association, the Catholic Women’s League of Canada and the Knights of Columbus.



Tim Lasiuta is a Red Deer-based writer with extensive publishing credits in a variety of media. His work has been published in Mad magazine, Comics Buyer’s Guide, True West magazine, and Canadian Cowboy Country magazine, and he has also published stories in anthologies based on the Lone Ranger, Zorro, the music of Rush, and the Green Hornet and other characters. He is a first-time grandpa.

2016 William D Hrychuk Memorial Award Winner—Michael Hauptman

It is with extreme pleasure that RMEC announces Michael Hauptman, superintendent of Elk Island Catholic Schools, as the recipient of the 2016 William D Hrychuk Memorial Award, for his outstanding achievements and distinguished service in religious studies and moral education.

Michael has spent his entire life enveloped in Catholic education, starting as a kindergarten student. He says, “The one constant in my life has been the Catholic school system. It grounds me, it instructs me, it challenges me, and hence has formed me.” This statement makes clear the power and potential of a Catholic education.

Michael has emerged as a respected leader in Catholic education across the province. He makes a difference in the lives of others through who he is, and his persona permeates his every word and action. Michael epitomizes the words *servant leader*. He is a man of action who possesses the rare blend of an outgoing and inviting personality, a deep understanding and conviction of faith, and the ability to make difficult decisions that are always guided by the one constant in his life—the caring, compassionate heart of Jesus. Michael truly understands what a gift Catholic education is, and he has the unique ability to create a Catholic educational culture throughout an entire school division.

A select group of servant leaders have dedicated their lives to making an impact at multiple levels for the benefit of Catholic education, and Michael Hauptman is one of them. He has addressed local and provincial needs in Catholic education and has served as a wise advisor and leading force in addressing Catholic education issues across the province. Catholic education is at times a complicated and delicate enterprise. Michael’s success can be attributed not only to his deep love of the Church and of Catholic education but also to his gift of acute political sensitivity. People relate to,



respond to and follow him because of his authenticity, sincerity and commitment to mission. His mantra “Whose feet are we washing?” keeps him focused.

Michael strives in every way possible to enrich and foster the unique Catholic education experience for all students in his school division, across the province and beyond. This makes him an outstanding role model for other Catholic leaders.

Some of the many examples of Michael’s outstanding achievements and distinguished service are as follows:

- He believes that everything starts with assurance. Faith permeates the Elk Island Catholic Schools strategic plan and assurance model, which has become the foundational document driving the actions and decisions of every person in the school division.
- He develops a three-year theme focus for the division, which ensures that everyone knows the mission, who they are and how they will evangelize as a Catholic

community. Each year the importance of the chosen theme resonates within the community in actions and in words.

- He was instrumental in establishing the EXCEL (Excellence in Catholic Education Leadership) Academy. He has also been chair of the planning committees for the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association's SPICE (Sharing Purpose in Catholic Education) and Blueprints retreats.
- He was featured in PolicyWise's Supporting Every Student Learning Series. He presented on creating safe, caring and welcoming environments for LGBTQ students.
- He has ensured that all schools in the district are clearly defined as Catholic in name and appearance. Each school has a patron saint, a chapel area and a chaplain and is in regular communication with parish priests. Last year Eucharistic adoration was a featured project in every school.
- He introduced and implemented the Catholic School Improvement Program, which focuses on what marks a Catholic school. This process provides feedback from the school, home, parish and students on a school's Catholic identity and the success of its formation activities.
- He believes that the ATA can serve as an ally and support system when strong relationships have been established. Elk Island Catholic Schools is one of the best districts in the province in terms of employee-employer relationships, as exemplified by the district having no grievances for the last four years.
- He has established high visibility in schools through the Active Schools Engagement Program, community stakeholder meetings, parish council meetings and relationships with partner school division leaders.
- Every decision about creating financial efficiencies is an effort to put money directly back into schools in order to enhance or add services. Michael has streamlined Central Learning Services operations, with the goal of maximizing instructional dollars for school allocation and shifting central operations to a service-based model. Now, 92 per cent of instructional funds are allocated directly to schools.

Michael is deserving of the William D Hrychuk Memorial Award because of his distinguished personal and professional characteristics but even more so because of his constant willingness to assist wherever needed. Over the last four years, his presence has resulted in a shift in the focus of Elk Island Catholic Schools from faith as a



description of who we are to faith as an action. This approach has become the centre of every document, decision and action of Michael's leadership.

Michael's focus on faith and the formation of staff has influenced the school community to embrace the mission of Catholic education. When ways are found to form staff, they gain the knowledge and ability to form students and the community as a whole.

The remarkable thing about Michael is that all this has been accomplished without any fanfare or self-adulation—things just happen quietly. An essence of calm permeates the events he is part of, which is especially appreciated during emotional moments of chaos, crisis and difficult change.

Joel Barker, a leading expert in change, states, "Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world."¹ Michael Hauptman is a humble disciple of Christ who has been gifted with incredible vision and an unparalleled dedication to action. We in Catholic education and the greater society beyond have been benefactors of his vision and action. Michael Hauptman has changed our world!

Congratulations, Michael!

Note

1. See www.vision-album.com (accessed January 6, 2017).

Do you know a colleague who is deserving of recognition? Be sure to nominate him or her for an RMEC award! RMEC offers awards for worthy recipients in several categories.

Check out the details on our website:
<http://rmec.teachers.ab.ca/awards/>.

Words Matter: The Importance of Language in Religious Education

Tomás Rochford

Words matter. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1–3). So begins the poetic prologue of Saint John’s gospel, proclaiming in beautiful verse some of the fundamentals of the faith: (1) the divinity of Christ, (2) the unity of God’s nature and (3) God’s creative activity. In contrast to Saint John’s use of *Word* (or *Logos*) to convey the truth of Divine reality, we have allowed the words describing our Christian faith to lose meaning and even to communicate falsehood. How has this happened? Why is it vital to reverse the imprecision and distortion of language expressing religious realities?

Secular Society and the Degeneration of Language

Ours is a time of lexical proliferation—text messages, social media, blogs, mass-market publications, 24-hour news. Yet it seems that for all our use of words, respect for the meaning and purpose of words has decreased. Those who form opinion (in the media, popular culture, academia and government) tell us that we now live in a “post-truth” society.¹ Words are no longer the means by which we communicate the reality of the world but, rather, tools to be used for the attainment of power and pleasure. Words such as *marriage*, *family*, *tolerance* and *person* can assume any meaning that a society, a legal system or even an individual desires them to have. Unfortunately, many Christians now acquiesce to this new normal.

Three Reasons Christian Educators Must Defend an Accurate Use of Words

Christian education and catechesis demand that we examine the current state of language and recover a realist use of words in our teaching of religious realities. We here examine the following three reasons to defend an accurate use of words: (1) words communicate our knowledge of God and structure our faith response, (2) words have sacramental significance in our lives, and (3) words can influence the modern mind to reject the Christian world view.

Words Communicate Our Knowledge of God and Structure Our Faith Response

The following illustration from the classroom indicates the important challenge to teachers to recapture accuracy in the language used to describe the basic tenets of the faith.

In my nine years as a high school religion teacher, I have often asked students to share with me their description of the Blessed Trinity. Invariably, students explain that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are parts or pieces of God.

Some teachers might regard this answer as a suitable first attempt, even though it is far from a full recital of the Athanasian Creed. Yet it should give us pause that such a definition of the Trinity comes from students, often from Mass-going families, after nine years or so of Catholic schooling. How is it that one of the two central mysteries of the Christian faith can be so ill-defined by students? (Need we add adults, too?) If we, as Christian teachers, really believe that God has revealed his triune nature to us, then this type of student response should spur us to clarify the language used to describe him. We would never accept an inaccurate portrayal of a complex empirical

phenomenon in biology or physics. How much more, then, should we demand linguistic rigour, precision and correctness in communicating about Divine realities.

The primary reason the proper use of words matters in Christian education relates to the purpose of language to communicate what is. Our words are meant to describe reality, however limited our grasp or comprehension. Thus, to know and believe even the most basic formulations of the faith (that is, credal statements about the incarnation and the Trinity) are essential. To be able to recite the Nicene or Apostles' Creed with conviction requires us to understand that our words are describing, even if only in a limited way, the most profound realities of existence.

These are not just convenient linguistic formulas but, rather, statements about the most fundamental truths of the universe. And even though we may not grasp these truths in their entirety—full comprehension being impossible for finite minds such as ours—we can certainly agree with Saint Thomas Aquinas's dictum (borrowing from Aristotle) that "a little knowledge of the highest things is greater than perfect knowledge of lesser things."² Such knowledge elevates human persons, bringing us into relationship with the God who created and redeemed us out of his superabundant love. But without a respect for the meaning of words and an emphasis on the use of correct language to express our knowledge of God, the truths of our faith are lost in verbal mush.

What's in a Word?

Many in our society oppose this emphasis on the use of clear and precise language to describe objective religious truths. Since they view religious realities as subjective or personal spiritual experiences, they think that one should not worry about semantics, or about "getting things right," but should just love God. (I wonder if these same proponents would be as quick to use sloppy, ambiguous terminology to express scientific, legal or economic realities.)

Although the proponents of this popular "just love God" perspective may believe that they are being more authentic Christians, they are demonstrating a careless indifference to Jesus Christ and his church. Many great saints, such as Saint Maximus the Confessor and Saint Athanasius, suffered or died over "mere words." Christianity almost ended in the

fourth and fifth centuries because of a disagreement over the Greek letter iota.³ If it had not been for Saint Athanasius and a few bishops, along with the lay faithful, the faith might have been defeated by the Arian heresy, disappearing into history as just one more oriental cult of the Roman Empire. Therefore, let us not fall prey to the current popular thinking that loving God is more important than getting the words about him right. Both are essential.

Words Have Sacramental Significance in Our Lives

The second reason we must defend the proper use of words in Christian education is that God himself has offered language as the key means by which Catholics may cooperate

with his supernatural grace. It was through the power of his word that our Lord forgave, healed and worked miracles. It is through the power of his words, recited today, that the sacraments are conferred.

How amazing that the words of a priest can change bread and wine into the very Body and Blood of Christ; that with the "Ego te absolvo" of the confessor, the mortal wounds of sinners are washed

clean; that the solemn vows of a man and a woman make them forever one flesh in the eyes of God and his church. Each of these sacramental acts requires that the words of human creatures cooperate with the Word, in whom speech is performative, bringing about a new reality in the world.

To have been granted a share in Divine activity through the power of words is one of our greatest blessings as God's children. It is something that should remind us of the gravity of words and the importance of language for the Christian faith.

Words Can Influence the Modern Mind to Reject the Christian World View

The third reason for emphasizing the importance and purpose of words in Christian education is that the manipulation of language, a frequent problem today, always entails a manipulation of people.

The great German Thomist Josef Pieper (1992, 7–39) said that an abuse of language is an abuse of power. When individuals, institutions or governments manipulate language, they use words not for their proper purposes (that is, to seek and communicate truth) but as tools to gain and maintain power.

Without a respect for the meaning of words and an emphasis on the use of correct language to express our knowledge of God, the truths of our faith are lost in verbal mush.

Reviewing 20th-century history, we can discern numerous examples of such abuse of language—such as in fascist and socialist propaganda. Today we see a renewed use of such techniques but now under the guises of the “dictatorship of relativism”⁴ and “totalitarian democracy,”⁵ which have begun to force Christian ideas out of the public sphere. To recognize the difference between traditional definitions of terms such as *diversity*, *inclusion* and *tolerance* and their new political uses is to be aware of the contemporary abuse of words that occurs for the purpose of gaining power.

In such a climate, Christian educators are all the more tasked with emphasizing the importance of words as links to reality. Otherwise, the Christian dogmatic and moral heritage, the truths that set us free from the slavery of sin and egotism, will be silenced. If this occurs, we as Christian educators will have reversed the Great Commission of Matthew 28 by rendering to Caesar what is God’s.

Nominalism Revisited

The modern comeback of nominalism, an ancient and medieval philosophical viewpoint, is one of the major challenges to the faith in today’s marketplace of ideas, as it makes moral and doctrinal catechesis very difficult. Dating back to William of Occam in the 14th century, and perhaps even further back to the Sophists of ancient Athens, nominalism has become almost ubiquitous in the past century as a result of the rise of postmodern thought.

Nominalism, as defined in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Hardon 2004, 378), is “a theory that universal ideas, like truth, goodness, and humanity, are only names. It denies that universals are true concepts, present in the mind, that correspond to and are founded on objective reality. All abstract ideas, according to the nominalists, are only useful labels.”

Thus, nominalism denies that words have any real relationship to reality as it is. Language becomes a tool to be used and manipulated for the sake of power. As Charles Pope (2014) writes, “Neo-nominalism claims the right to define new reality and scoffs at the more humble proposition that we ought to discover reality and conform to it. Nominalism casts aside such humility and claims the right to merely define reality by inventing new words and thoughts and then imposing them on what really is.”

The devaluing of language by nominalism poses a key threat to what we do as Christian educators, for it denies

the reality of truth itself. It must be defeated in the classroom so that the Word that is God may be known, loved and shared with the world.

How to Restore Language for the Sake of Christian Education

Following are practical suggestions for restoring the importance of words in Christian religious education.

First, we must, as teachers, persevere in holding fast the importance of words and linguistic accuracy. Although societal pressures and convenience may tempt us to accept a quasi-nominalistic devaluation of language, we must defend the central importance that words have in the Christian world view.

Second, we must make a concerted effort in Christian schools to recover the “lost tools of learning,” as Dorothy Sayers (1947) famously called them—the trivium of the liberal arts: grammar, logic and rhetoric. It is hardly an accident that centuries of Christian education have shown these disciplines to be foundational not only for the activity of the “free person” but also as a necessary preparation for reading and comprehending Sacred Scripture.⁶

Third, we must make use of the excellent resources available to assist us in learning and teaching the vocabulary of the faith. Fortunately, numerous contemporary texts, such as lexicons and Bible dictionaries, are available for just this purpose.⁷

Finally, we must set a high standard for graduates of Christian schools regarding their use of language in relation to the faith. We should expect the average graduate to be able to succinctly define and explain central Christian beliefs, such as the Blessed Trinity and the incarnation, without falling into obvious heresy.⁸ This graduate should also be able to proffer basic Christian answers to moral questions that arise in modern society. In addition, the average Christian graduate should have sufficient facility with words to enable him or her to read the Gospels intelligently.

I realize that such demands will be considered too difficult (or too intellectual) by some, while for others they may appear to be merely scratching the surface. However, these key expectations should be considered our contribution, as religious educators, to helping our students fulfill Saint Peter’s exhortation to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Christian educators are . . .
tasked with emphasizing
the importance of words
as links to reality.

Notes

1. See recent articles in *The Economist* (2016) and the *New York Times* (Davies 2016).

2. Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae, I-II*, q 66, a 5.

3. The Orthodox term *homoousion* means *of the same substance*, or *consubstantial* as it is found in the Nicene Creed. *Homoiousion* means *of similar substance*, which was the Semi-Arian claim: that Jesus Christ was not fully God but only of similar substance to the Father, and therefore not equal in nature or dignity. One iota was all the difference.

4. See Pope Benedict XVI's homily before the 2005 Papal Conclave (www.ewtn.com/pope/words/conclave_homily.asp).

5. A helpful resource is Legutko's (2016) recent book *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*.

6. Two articles of interest in this regard are Caldecott's (2012) "Child, Person, Teacher: At the Heart of a Catholic School" and Turley's (2016) "Is Classical Education Revitalizing Christian Culture?"

7. Some examples are Hahn's (2009) *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, Hardon's (2004) *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, Wallace's (2012) *The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians* and the Pontifical Council for the Family's (2006) *Lexicon: Debatable and Ethical Questions Regarding Family Life*.

8. This, of course, includes due accommodations made for linguistic difficulties in special needs and English as a second language (ESL) contexts.

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Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal *Fully Alive* is published to

- 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.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

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- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

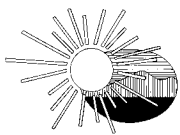
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