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## From the Editor and Table of Contents

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# Bringing Catholic Education to Life

A glance along just one bookshelf in my room reveals the many-sided diamond that is Catholic Education: *Educating for Life, Formation for Evangelization, Strengthening the Heartbeat, Teaching with Fire, Reimagining the Catholic School, Teaching and Religious Imagination, Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario.*

More than forty years immersion in the sometimes turbulent waters of Catholic Education has taught me a thing or two. My students, my colleagues, the parents, some insightful speakers and writers have educated me. I was far from fully prepared when I stood in front of my first French class at Neil McNeil in 1964. I needed the challenge of the religion classes in the 1970s, the four summers at Boston College's Institute for Religious Education, the Catholic Teachers Centre and the Adult Faith Formation years at Toronto and Dufferin Peel Catholic School Boards and now my work as chaplain to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association.

As teachers we talk a lot. We need to listen and learn. I remember the student who taught me most about teaching. He was leaving Neil for a Public School. We talked after the Friday class. He asked if he could say something before he left: "Do you mind if I say this? You always seem to look over our heads instead of into our eyes." I went home and all that weekend I asked myself, "Was he right?" If so, I was overlooking all that was going on in and behind those eyes — the joys and sorrows, the dreams and fears, the hopes and questions. "It's so important to invite them to ask their questions and to pick up on these," said a teaching colleague in a recent conversation. Any life-giving curriculum is to be found in both the textbook and the world of the student.

First Nations woman, Krystal Kewayosh, introduced me to her people's basic curriculum at a convention. "Teach the fours," she advised us. The four seasons, the four winds, the four dimensions, the four elements, the four human components (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual), the four cardinal directions (creator, self, neighbour, earth), the four types of students (sponge, sieve, strainer, funnel).

She got me thinking: as Catholics we could add a few more fours — the four gospels, the four Eucharistic actions (Jesus took, gave thanks, broke/poured, gave away), the four dimensional Sign of the Cross, our birth-life-death-resurrection story.

I remember talking with a mother of two — a girl starting high school, a boy still in grade school: "Light a fire in the kids about learning. Don't just pass on what's in the textbook. How you choose to see the children makes all the difference. Affirm them in their struggles, their disappointments, in whatever makes them feel less. Encourage them in their desires and dreams and commitments." Poet W.B. Yeats' words came to mind: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

No one can sum up in one sentence what it means to be a Catholic teacher. But Pope John Paul II came as close as anyone else: "To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe."

What we believe is modeled on Jesus the Teacher. He began to do and to teach — actions first, then words — words made flesh. We see how he dealt with people, how he found in their daily life examples of God's presence and what God's kingdom was like, how he challenged the rules and regulations people, what his priorities were, who his kind of people were.

In our 2008 Calendar Catholic educators in the so-called missions come face to face with a people who realize the importance of the spiritual in human life. Their counterparts in the so-called developed world come face to face with a majority overwhelmed by the concerns of the marketplace and poorly informed about religious matters. To both groups of educators Jesus would say, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Find ways to bring it to life."

Pat Fitzpatrick, CSSp

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