

# Teachers as Missionary Disciples: Forming Witnesses for Catholic Schools

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Dr. Dean Sarnecki



*"The great challenge for Catholic schools in an increasingly secularized society is to present the Christian message in a convincing and systematic way. . . The identity and success of Catholic education is linked inseparably to the witness of life given by the teaching staff. . . School staff, who truly live their faith, will be agents of a new evangelization in creating a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care. "*

Pope Saint John Paul II



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## Acronyms

ACSTA: Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association  
CCSSA: Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta  
GrACE: Grateful Advocates for Catholic Education  
CCE: Congregation for Catholic Education (now Dicastery for Culture and Education. Vatican)  
RE: Religious Education  
CWL: Catholic Women's League  
K of C: Knights of Columbus  
RCIA: Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults  
REMEC: Religion and Moral Education Council of ATA  
ATA: Alberta Teachers Association  
TFF: Teacher Faith Formation

# Introduction: About the February 2024 ACSTA Symposium

## Overview

The Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association (ACSTA) symposium sought to engage the Catholic education community in discussions to develop a framework for the formation of both preservice and in-service teachers. Held on February 9th and 10th at the Catholic Parish of Corpus Christi in Edmonton, the event brought together 130 members of the Catholic education community from across Alberta (and beyond). Participants engaged in discussions and reflections, sharing their mission and vision of Catholic teacher faith formation.

Over the course of two days, the symposium featured a combination of presentations, discussions, reflections, fellowship, worship and prayer. Leaders and high-profile researchers in the field shared their work and collaborated with attendees to develop a comprehensive framework and strategy for teacher formation.

The symposium was organized in response to a motion from the September 2022 ACSTA Board of Directors' Meeting. This motion highlighted the challenge many school divisions were facing in finding Catholic teachers sufficiently formed to carry out the mission of Catholic schools. It called for discussions with educators, parents, academics, and clergy from across Alberta, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories to identify the needs and processes required for the formation and professional development of Catholic educators.

This document is the culmination of the rich exchanges and insights gathered over the course of those two days.

## Purpose of the Symposium

The symposium aimed to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration among the Catholic community, church leaders, school leaders, and experts to develop a framework and list of tools to support the formation of preservice and in-service teachers in Alberta, NWT, and Yukon.

Central to this effort was the engagement of academic researchers and system leaders who presented and discussed their work on teacher faith formation. By exploring current spiritual, theological, and pedagogical practices, attendees sought to understand the deep theoretical knowledge base that underpins the mission of Catholic education.

A key focus was evaluating the availability and adequacy of teacher faith formation programs at the post-secondary level. Participants examined how these resources are being utilized and identified areas for potential expansion and improvement.

The symposium also explored the Church's influence on teachers' motivations and beliefs about teaching in Catholic schools, as well as how the Church and broader community could inspire and evangelize young people in a secular age. The impact of teacher faith formation on students, religious education outcomes, and the development of future Catholic witnesses was also analyzed.

Another important aspect was assessing the relationship between (a) pedagogical knowledge, (b) spiritual and theological formation, and (c) professionalism. This included identifying existing programs and opportunities for both pre- and in-service teachers, as well as exploring partnerships with educational and theological institutes.

The symposium emphasized the importance of continually refreshing teachers' theological and spiritual understanding. It evaluated the integration of the latest research on religious education into teacher faith formation and how secular pedagogy could be enhanced by spiritual and theological themes.

Additionally, participants reviewed whether teachers' knowledge and faith formation met the expectations for teaching 21st-century skills within the Church. They discussed the resources provided by the Church and how these are being utilized in coursework, professional development, evaluations, and planning.

Ultimately, the symposium aimed to create a comprehensive strategy for effective teacher formation, addressing both preservice and in-service needs, while fostering ongoing dialogue to strengthen Catholic education in the region<sup>1</sup>.

## Participants

Selection of participants by the organizers was intentional and invitations were sent to various provincial education and Catholic organizations. School boards were encouraged to sponsor up to 10 individuals representing a cross-section of their Catholic education community. This included bishops, priests, trustees, superintendents, representatives from provincial organizations, Religious Education consultants, teachers, University students, parents, academics, and parishioners. Those invited were expected to have the knowledge, skills, and formation to contribute meaningfully.

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<sup>1</sup> For further background on the rationale and preparations for the symposium refer to Appendix I.

# Catholic Teachers as Ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)

## Overview

In 2017 Archbishop Richard Smith released a pastoral letter entitled 'Living in the Word of God: the Call to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese of Edmonton'.<sup>2</sup> In this document he asks, "What does it mean to follow Jesus?" His answer was rather simple: "To be an authentic disciple of Christ is to first listen to God's word, and then put it into practice". This pastoral letter, to which he referred in his talk at the symposium, can provide a template for understanding teacher faith formation moving forward in Alberta.

Archbishop Smith reminds us that St. Paul teaches that faith comes from what is heard (Romans 10: 17), and that the first act of each true disciple—for that's what every teacher in a Catholic school is called to be—is to listen carefully to what God is calling them to do through the teachings and model of Jesus Christ. All faith formation starts with an attentiveness to the Word of God in our lives, and teachers are no exception. The Word of God can be encountered in our Christ-centered relationships to other people, in prayer, in Sacred Scripture, and most fully in the Holy Eucharist. But how do we put the Word into practice? Archbishop Smith suggested that, throughout the history of the Church, the Christian response to God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ has been threefold: (1) worship, (2) witness, and (3) service. For Catholic teachers, faith formation and continuous growth in holiness are found in these three practices.

## Worship

For Catholics, the significance of the Eucharist in worship is rooted in Jesus' command at the Last Supper, to "Do this in memory of me." This command underlies the Church's insistence on Sunday Mass as a sacred obligation. This obligation is not to be viewed as a burden, but rather as a joyful duty, where believers offer their lives to God in praise and in thanksgiving. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "The Eucharist is 'the source and summit' of Christian life" (1324-1327). It nourishes the faithful with the Body and Blood of Christ, and is essential for missionary discipleship. Indeed, as Christ our teacher says himself in John 6:53, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." Catholic teachers, therefore, if they are to follow "a lifestyle and deportment in harmony with the principles of the Gospel and teachings of the Catholic Church," must regularly and actively participate in the Mass. And, while there are many forms of worship, the

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<sup>2</sup>Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. (2017, September 14). *Pastoral letter: Living in the word of God—A faithful letter*. Retrieved from <https://caedm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2017-09-14-PastoralLetter-Faithful-Letter.pdf>

Eucharist remains the heart of Catholic worship and should be central to the lives of all believers.

## **Witness**

Drawing from St. John's words in his first letter:

"We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." (1 John 1:1-4).

When Christians encounter Christ and are transformed by His love, we naturally want to share this experience with others and invite them into a joyful community. This act of witness, inspired by the Holy Spirit and strengthened through the sacraments, is expressed not just in words, but primarily by how we live our lives. Faith-filled witnesses engage in self-examination of their actions, thoughts, and words, and how they are reflecting the model of Christ. Being a witness challenges Christians to speak the truth (even when it's difficult), relying on the Holy Spirit for strength.

## **Service**

Service is a fundamental aspect of Christian life, rooted in Jesus' command to love one another as He has loved us. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper, he set for us an example of service, showing that love in action means making daily sacrifices for the good of others. Worship and Witness naturally lead to service, expressed through our time, talents, and financial resources.

The way in which Christians spend their time – whether it be in prayer, worshiping at Mass, serving others (particularly family, the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable), and learning about God – is indicative of one's spiritual growth. Catholic teachers, then, are also called to consider how they share their talents and experiences with the Church and the broader community, responding to the Christian baptismal call to be missionary disciples to all. Archbishop Smith also highlighted financial stewardship, with a call to prioritize giving in our budgets and planning. This is a lesson that applies to school divisions, too; challenging them to reflect on how to give proportionally—even sacrificially—to further the mission of the Church by supporting the faith formation of their staff.

## Mercy at the Heart of It All

Our need for mercy becomes especially clear as we strive to do God's Word through worship, witness and service. *True* worship, especially through celebration of the Eucharist, requires that we examine our way of living so as first to seek forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Credible witness demands that we be healed of any sinful ways of living that do not correspond to what we profess to believe. Joyful service of others arises when God's mercy heals us of sin that closes us off from God and other people.

# Living in the Word of God: A Template for Teacher Faith Formation Rooted in Christ

Integrating Catholic teacher faith formation into Archbishop Richard Smith's pastoral letter, *Living in the Word of God* (2017), provides a rich framework for nurturing teachers as disciples who are both listeners and doers of God's Word.

His call to discipleship through worship, witness, and service offers a concrete path for shaping the spiritual and professional lives of Catholic educators in Alberta. Here's how this approach could align with and deepen teacher faith formation.

## Mercy as the Foundation of Formation

Archbishop Smith reminds us that authentic worship, witness, and service must be grounded in God's mercy. Teachers, like all Christians, need ongoing conversion and healing through reconciliation. This recognition of human frailty fosters a compassionate and humble approach to both teaching and leading by example.

### Formation Implementation

- Make opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation available to teachers during formation retreats and throughout the year.
- Encourage self-reflection on how mercy shapes teachers' interactions with students, particularly in moments of conflict or challenge.
- Emphasize the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation within the school community, ensuring that mercy becomes a lived value within relationships and teaching practices.

## Worship: Eucharist at the Heart of Teacher Formation

Eucharist, thanksgiving, is the heart of Catholic belief and worship. Our approach and engagement with Eucharist is complex and constantly growing in knowledge and faith. While Catholic teachers' faith formation must begin with an emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist, the recognition that not all teachers in Catholic schools are Catholic, and those who are, many have limited engagement with Eucharist, formation in this area is essential for all. As Archbishop Smith highlights, the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of Catholic life, the ultimate act of worship, where believers are nourished spiritually and called to a deeper union with Christ. For teachers, an invitation and formation for regular participation in the Eucharist is necessary with the goal being to lead them to a personal act of faith and in time see Eucharist as an essential source of strength for their vocation as witnesses and role models to their students.

### **Formation Implementation**

- Encourage teachers to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist through theological reflection and personal participation.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to attend retreats, adoration, and Mass, ensuring these experiences are part of professional development days.
- Incorporate reflections on the Eucharist into regular school gatherings, encouraging teachers to model this sacramental life to students.

### **Witness: Teachers as Living Testimonies of Christ's Love**

As witnesses, teachers are called to reflect the Gospel not just in words but through their daily lives, much like St. John invites believers to share their personal encounters with Christ. Archbishop Smith's emphasis on listening to and acting upon God's Word challenges teachers to be mindful of their role as witnesses, both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Formation Implementation**

- Provide mentorship programs that help teachers integrate their personal faith journeys into their professional roles.
- Facilitate small group faith-sharing opportunities where teachers can reflect on how their faith influences their teaching, decision-making, and relationships with students and colleagues.
- Encourage teachers to act as witnesses through engagement in service projects, mission trips, and local community outreach programs with their students.

### **Service: A Call to Love in Action**

Archbishop Smith's reference to Christ's model of service, particularly His washing of the disciples' feet, reinforces the idea that teaching itself is a form of service. Catholic educators are called to embody the spirit of humility and sacrificial love in their work. This extends beyond academic instruction to the spiritual care and well-being of students, colleagues, and the broader school community.

### **Formation Implementation**

- Introduce service-based learning as a key component of teacher faith formation, integrating acts of service into staff retreats and professional development.
- Establish reflection sessions where teachers can discern how their professional duties align with the call to serve others in the spirit of Christ's love.

- Encourage teachers to involve students in service projects, cultivating a culture of service throughout the school community.

## **Leadership and Stewardship**

Archbishop Smith also touches on financial stewardship and the need to support the Church's mission. For Catholic schools, this means intentional planning and resource allocation toward the faith formation of staff, ensuring it remains a priority.

### **Formation Implementation**

- School divisions can demonstrate leadership in faith formation by investing in programs, resources, and training that support teachers' ongoing spiritual development.
- Leadership teams can model sacrificial giving by allocating budget resources toward faith-based professional development opportunities.

## **Conclusion: A Holistic Approach to Formation**

By aligning teacher faith formation with Archbishop Smith's pastoral letter, Catholic educators are invited into a holistic journey of faith—grounded in worship, animated by witness, and sustained through service. These practices, coupled with an ongoing openness to God's mercy, create a vibrant framework for faith formation that not only enriches teachers but also shapes the Catholic identity of the entire school community.

# The Vision for Catholic Teacher Formation: An Integrative Approach Rooted in Church Documents

Catholic education, Catholic schools, and catechesis are cornerstones of the Church's mission to lead the world to salvation, aimed at providing not just academic excellence but also the holistic development of students in accordance with the teachings of the gospel and a life directed towards growing in holiness. The formation of Catholic teachers, therefore, plays a pivotal role in the Church's mission. Church documents such as *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), *The Catholic School* (1977), *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (2007), and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), provide comprehensive guidelines and criteria on the essential elements of Catholic teacher faith formation. In particular, the "Criteria for Formation" (para. 135ff), found in the new *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), clearly details the following:

## Foundational Principles

The Second Vatican Council's declaration, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), emphasizes the paramount importance of education in the life of the Church, stating that "all Christians have a right to a Christian education" (GE, 1). This document outlines that the primary role of Catholic educators is to ensure that students grow in their understanding and practice of the faith. The faith formation of Catholic teachers, therefore, must be rooted in a deep understanding of the Church's educational mission, a commitment to fostering faith, and an unwavering dedication to professional excellence.

## Spiritual and Theological Formation

Central to the faith formation of Catholic teachers is their spiritual and theological education. The document *The Catholic School* (1977) underscores that teachers in Catholic schools must not only be professionally competent but also imbued with a living faith. It highlights that the teacher's role is not just to impart knowledge but to be a witness to Christ: "The Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and purposes" (CS, 43). This requires ongoing spiritual formation, including participation in the sacramental life, engagement in personal prayer, and theological studies that deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith.

## Professional Competence

Professional development is another critical component of teacher faith formation. The Church document *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (2007) stresses the need for teachers to possess both pedagogical skills and a clear understanding of their educational responsibilities in the context of a Catholic

school. It states, "Teachers should constantly improve their professional qualifications and be adequately remunerated" (ETCS, 22). Thus, Catholic teacher faith formation programs must ensure that educators are well-versed in contemporary educational methodologies, classroom management, and subject matter expertise, while integrating these with a Catholic worldview, a spirit of communion, and knowledge of Catholic teachings.

## **Pastoral Care and Community Building**

Catholic teachers are also called to be pastoral ministers who care for the spiritual and emotional well-being of their students. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) highlights the teacher's role in creating a nurturing and inclusive school environment: "The teacher must be willing to give witness through his/her personal relationship with the students, marked by a spirit of service and availability" (RDECS, 26). This pastoral aspect involves forming genuine relationships with students, recognizing their individual needs, and fostering a sense of community within the school.

## **Integration of Faith and Life**

A distinctive characteristic of Catholic education is the integration of faith throughout one's daily life. The document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) emphasizes that lay Catholic educators must harmonize their professional and spiritual lives, serving as role models of Christian virtues. It states, "By their witness and their behavior, teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools" (LCS, 16). Teacher faith formation programs, therefore, should encourage educators to reflect on their vocation, helping them to live out their faith in every aspect of their professional and personal lives.

## **Conclusion**

The faith formation of Catholic teachers is a multifaceted, lifelong process, involving spiritual, theological, professional, and pastoral development. Grounded in Church documents, faith formation aims to prepare educators who are not only skilled in their profession but also dedicated to fostering a Catholic ethos within their schools. By adhering to the principles outlined in these documents and others, Catholic teacher faith formation programs can ensure that educators are well-equipped to fulfill their vital role in the Church's educational mission.

## Defining Faith Formation for Teachers in Alberta

Throughout the symposium, participants and speakers voiced profound concerns about the insufficient faith formation of teachers currently serving in Alberta's Catholic schools. Contributing factors to the lack of faith formation included: the secular nature of teacher education in Alberta (and Canadian universities more broadly), the scarcity of faith formation opportunities within teacher preparation programs in the province, and the broader secularization of society that curtails religious and faith engagement for many. The discussion highlighted the urgent need for ongoing faith formation as a lifelong commitment, emphasizing the role of school divisions in supporting both pre- and in-service teachers at every stage of their careers.

Only those who humbly and constantly recognize themselves as “in formation”, in fact, can hope to be a good “formator” for others, and education, at any level, is always first of all sharing paths and communicating experiences, in that joyful search for truth, “which makes the heart of every man restless until he encounters, dwells in and shares with all the Light of God” (Pope Francis, August 12, 2024).

“To train someone,” said one professor, “is to provide mastery in a skill or talent, often through repetitive action or rote learning. Mastery comes with the repetition of the desired skill to the point of being able to achieve at a high level or perfection. Formation is more than training and incorporates the entire being of the learner. To form someone is to enable them to shape themselves more completely spiritually, physically, emotionally, and socially, which often leads that person to grow and change permanently. In forming, one does not simply acquire a skill but becomes someone new. Formation is greater than training.” She put a period on the discussion with the following statement: “People train dogs; teachers form human beings.”

While training is often equated with education, ‘formation’ (from the Latin *formatio*, meaning ‘to mould’), is the term used in this document to describe the cultivation of Catholic educators, students, and the entire school community. Kirylo and Aldridge (2019) differentiate ‘training’ (knowing *how*) from ‘formation’ (knowing *why*). Teachers should be more than mere technicians; their preparation should focus on ethical and social formation.

Graham (2011) described formation as a process of growth through daily life, aiming for higher states of being. In Catholic education, this involves realizing one's true self in relation to God. *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the New Millennium* (1997) from the Congregation for Catholic Education emphasized the importance of both learning *and* formation, integrating knowledge with moral and religious virtues in order to develop the whole person.

This form of education also encourages outward concern for 'society', inspiring students to bear witness to their faith.

Bellows (2013) viewed formation as a lifelong acceptance of God's love and a response to evangelization and catechesis within a Christ-centered mission. The Congregation for the Clergy (1997) outlined the importance of forming catechists to teach in Christ's name. 'Formation' is a key concept in Catholic education, ensuring that educators – in addition to supporting human flourishing – are equipped to further the Church's mission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20). For Bellows, “Formation is a life-long process of coming to accept God's unconditional love graciously and respond in love to God and to one another.

'Evangelisation', 'catechesis' and 'formation' are all part of the same “Christ-centred, ecclesial mission” (p. 34). Recent Church documents reinforce the language of formation and the need to form teachers so as to enhance their commitment to the educational mission of the Church (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007). Ongoing formation should respond to the changing realities of education in relation to the Church's role in the world (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014), and teachers must receive formation that helps them articulate the Catholic worldview in ways engaging and relevant to students (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). The language of formation in this report is intentional - Catholic educational institutions and the Catholic community are entrusted with the task of ensuring that those serving in Catholic schools are formed to a level that authentically and honestly ensures that they will be equipped to further the Church's mission *and* support human flourishing.

# Summary of Keynote Speakers:

## Overview

There were five keynote speakers at the symposium, each of whom addressed a specific angle related to Catholic teacher faith formation. Archbishop Smith spoke on behalf of the Bishops of Alberta to the role of the Catholic teacher within the mission of the Church. Dr. Hoven, a professor of Catholic education at St. Joseph's College at the University of Alberta, provided an overview of the post-secondary landscape in the province and the undergraduate formation opportunities available in the province currently. Dr. Roisin Coll, an internationally renowned Catholic educator and researcher at the University of Glasgow, offered both a philosophy of formation and a comparative model from Scotland where she leads faith formation for the Scottish bishops. Finally, Superintendents Paul Corrigan and Ryan Ledene spoke to the challenges and opportunities for faith formation in their role as system leaders. Four of the speakers were present in person and the fifth, Dr. Coll, due to logistics, online. The five speakers presented over four time slots Friday night and Saturday, and a final fifth presentation was a panel discussion of the four speakers present in-person. Participants were able to question all speakers following their presentations and the four speakers in person during the concluding panel discussion.

## Archbishop Richard Smith

*Archbishop of Edmonton and Alberta/NWT Bishop's Conference Liaison for Catholic Schools, "Bishop as Witness and Catholic Education Leader."*

Archbishop Smith focussed on the concept of 'missionary discipleship', emphasizing the vocational nature of being sent out to do missionary work in schools; work that lasts a lifetime. He highlighted the role of teachers in Christian education as outlined in Vatican II with an emphasis on teachers as witnesses. The talk also touched on the results of the synodal process in his Archdiocese, which had revealed a thirst for formation among the people and recognition of the need for all individuals to be formed as witnesses.

The Archbishop's presentation referenced Luke 8, emphasizing the importance of hearing the Word of God and putting it into practice. It underscored the supreme authority of the Word of God, which requires a surrender of one's life to God. The beginning of the Christian life was described as an encounter with God, rather than just ideas and concepts.

The talk also touched on the importance of tradition, apostolic succession, and the role of bishops in handing down authentic teachings. Response to the Word of God, or putting it into practice, is threefold, namely, through worship, witness, and service. Particular focus should be given to making the Eucharist the heart of Catholic teachers' lives, in the same way that it should be for any Catholic.

Archbishop Smith stressed the significance of being an authentic witness, with a call to help teachers become confident witnesses by returning to the basics Catholic teachings. His Grace emphasized the focusing on fundamentals, including Catholic moral teachings and scripture, and by fostering a life of service motivated by a loving heart. The image of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was highlighted as worthy of emulation.

### **Dr. Matt Hoven**

*Associate Professor and Kule Chair in Catholic Religious Education, St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta, "Teacher Faith Formation in Local Catholic Schools: The Current State and Future Direction."*

Dr. Hoven highlighted the importance of Teacher Faith Formation (TFF) for Catholic education overall, emphasizing the need for all educators and partners to take risks and instill hope in individuals. He referred to many Pope Francis quotes on the importance of Catholic education ("the dictatorship of functionalism"), biblical verses (Mk 16:15, Eph 5:14), and the significance of TFF in pre-service education programs at institutions like Newman Theological College, St. Joseph's College, and St. Mary's University.

TFF was underscored as being fundamental to the mission and purpose of Catholic schools, drawing parallels to both the teachings of St. Augustine and more recent research that promotes TFF as "the radical and fundamental work of the Spirit." The integration of CST (Catholic Social Teachings) and *kerygma* (Greek for 'proclamation of the faith') was deemed vital to the role of Catholic teachers, emphasizing social justice, and spreading the good news as central for teachers to become witnesses of faith.

Dr. Hoven referred to Fr. David Bauer as an example of a person who maintained a life fully integrated with and formed by his faith, serving as a witness to faith while coaching hockey. The talk referenced a study on hope by the ATA (2023) and encouraged individuals to reflect on their own Catholic identity by asking, "Why are you Catholic?" This question needs to be reflected on by all believers regularly.

### **Dr. Roisin Coll**

*Professor of Catholic Education, University of Glasgow, "Teachers as Missionary Disciples: Forming Witnesses for Catholic Schools."*<sup>3</sup>

In Catholic education, distinguishing between the term's 'disciple' and 'witness' is essential. A disciple is one who learns and grows in wisdom from the master, while a witness – derived from the Greek word for martyr – professes the gospel even when it is countercultural and challenging. Witnesses offer their lives to Christ daily; St.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Coll's talk was presented through the Peter and Doris Kule Lecture in Religious Education (St. Joseph's College) in collaboration with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association.

Jerome's view was that martyrdom involves serving God with love and purity of heart every day.

For Dr. Coll, Catholic teachers face a choice: give witness to gospel values or neglect their faith. Teachers must mature from being disciples (followers) who learned from the Apostles, to evangelizers who are sent out to teach and embody Christ's mission. St. Paul's concept of Christians as 'ambassadors for Christ' was crucial to Dr. Coll's emphasis on the teacher's role as both learner and messenger.

Dr. Coll referred to the Scottish Catholic education system to illustrate her ideas. The Catholic Church in Scotland holds authority over the hiring of teachers for Catholic schools and religious education. Primary school teachers must be Catholic and receive certification from St. Andrews University (delegated from the Bishops of Scotland), while secondary school religion teachers need specialized certification in their field of expertise. Non-Catholic teachers require the bishop's approval, including a character assessment. Despite these measures, many teachers still lack deep knowledge of Catholicism after years of primary and secondary Catholic education – a problem also seen in Canada. This lack of faith formation hinders teachers' ability to reflect and teach the faith.

A distinctively Catholic curriculum, Dr. Coll proposed, both in secondary schools and teacher preparation programs, is necessary in order to integrate faith and reason and encourage students to live lives of faith and discernment. This Catholic curriculum in Catholic schools should showcase the best of humanity and foster a deep partnership in the search for truth. Schools must demonstrate their values throughout the curriculum so as to offer students ample opportunity to engage with and think about the world from a Catholic perspective, which can over time lead to a deepening of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Forming Catholic teachers should start early, encompassing their own childhood in a fully Catholic environment. Authentic Catholic schools rely on *believing* Catholic teachers who actively know and practice a Catholic culture, reflecting a clear Catholic identity and mission. Prioritizing Catholic culture ensures schools genuinely nurture faith. When we cultivate believing Catholic teachers, we create distinctively Catholic schools that can properly assist in the mission of the Church.

### **Superintendents Paul Corrigan & Ryan Ledene**

*Corrigan - Elk Island Catholic Schools, CCSSA President; Ledene - Red Deer Catholic Schools, CCSSA Past President, "Tales from the Field Hospital."*

The speakers shared a variety of stories intended to discuss the concept of meeting people where they are at in our Catholic schools. They discussed the need for mutual support on the journey to eternal life, referencing Pope Francis's metaphor of the Church as a field hospital for those in need of healing and guidance. Corrigan and Ledene also touched on the challenges of – and *to* – Catholic education in a

secular, government-funded context, drawing from their own experiences in the field of education. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) in Matthew, and the Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes* provided much food for thought and reflection in the life of a Catholic education leader.

Corrigan and Ledene highlighted the importance of forming staff who are already teaching in Catholic schools, emphasizing the connection between education and love, and the need for teachers to have a personal identification with Christ. The presentation also explored the role of teachers as witnesses in Catholic education, stressing the significance of consistency of opportunity, belief and messaging in schools and across the divisions.

The differences between 'permeation' and 'integration' were addressed, with a focus on the need for an understanding of both. Overall, the superintendents raised many questions about faith formation, the collaboration of school divisions with parishes, working closely with Catholic post-secondary schools, and looking at how divisions might measure the effectiveness of faith formation efforts in schools.

## Identified Themes and Insights

Twenty table groups participated in the discussions following each presentation and submitted data, including examples and reflections on the talks and guiding questions that followed. These findings were divided into three major themes, containing a number of different insights. The raw data can be found in Appendix II.

### Formation Experiences: Impactful Formation Experiences Experienced by Participants

Archbishop Smith's talk, and the reflection questions that followed, highlighted the diverse and profound ways in which personal relationships, educational experiences, community involvement, and spiritual practices can contribute to the formation and deepening of faith in people. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in nurturing a vibrant and resilient Catholic faith, underscoring the importance of a holistic approach to faith formation in Catholic education: more vital than knowledge of faith is often *relationships*.

#### Personal Relationships and Role Models – Witnesses Create Witnesses

1. **Parental Influence:** Parents, through their secure sense of God's love and forgiveness, played a crucial role in nurturing unwavering faith in their children and extended family. Each parent offered inspiration, but the mother's and father's faith were seen differently in many cases.

**Example:**

Father's Quiet Devotion: Observing a father's quiet but consistent faith practice.

Mother's Devotion: Witnessing a mother's deep commitment to her faith.

Grandparents' Faith: Grandparents, particularly in times of loss, demonstrated resilience and reliance on faith.

2. **Grandparents' Faith:** Grandparents, particularly in times of loss, demonstrated resilience and reliance on faith. Grandparents have a significant impact on young people, and their example can have a lasting impact on the faith of their grandchildren.
1. **Inspirational Teachers:** Teachers in general were mentioned as witnesses, especially those able to integrate faith, education and life. Many highlighted exceptional religion teachers with a passion for the Catholic faith as significantly shaping their personal beliefs.

## Faith-Based Events and Programs

1. **Special Events:** Participating in events like the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Blueprints, SPICE, and division faith days contributed to personal faith development.
2. **Pilgrimages:** Visiting holy sites, such as Fatima, Skaro, Mission Hill (St. Albert), and the Camino provided profound spiritual experiences.
3. **Symposiums and Conferences:** Attending various faith-based symposiums and conferences, including those facilitated by the ACSTA and at the LA Congress, offered valuable learning and spiritual growth opportunities.

## Education and Formation

1. **Theological Studies:** Pursuing degrees in theology (particularly at Newman Theological College) strengthened the faith of those who participated.
2. **Catholic Education:** Attending and receiving a well-integrated Catholic education as a young person helped to build a solid foundation of faith for many.
3. **Catechesis and Religious Education:**
  - **RCIA:** Involvement in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as a participant and/or sponsor was seen as a strong faith formation process and experience.
  - **Youth Ministry and Retreats:** Participating in youth retreats as a young person, and leading retreats and working in youth ministries as an adult, was a transformative experience.

## Community and Parish Life

1. **Parish Involvement:** Active participation in parish life, including mass attendance, serving as a lector, serving as an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, serving on parish council, and being involved in community volunteer activities (like those facilitated by the St. Vincent de Paul Society) reinforced a sense of belonging and Catholic faith identity.
2. **Knights of Columbus/Catholic Women's League:** Engagement with fraternal groups like the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Women's League, the secular Franciscans and similar such activities fostered a deeper faith connection.
3. **Mass and Sacraments:** Regular participation in Sunday Mass and other sacramental activities deepened spiritual practices for many participants.

## Personal and Family Experiences

1. **Conversion Experiences:** Both personal and familial conversions, such as a spouse converting to Catholicism and participating in RCIA, were impactful on many people; not just those converting.

2. **Life Events:** Significant life events like becoming a parent, serious illness, a death in the family or sacramental preparation often brought a renewed sense of faith and spiritual responsibility.
3. **Encounters with God:** Moments of solitude or crisis – such as feeling lonely while traveling and finding solace in a church, encountering God in nature or through friends – reinforced God's presence in people's lives.

### **Spiritual Practices and Guidance**

1. **Prayer and Devotionals:** The adoption of regular prayer practices such as Eucharistic adoration, daily Mass, spiritual reading and the Rosary were central to maintaining and deepening one's faith.
2. **Spiritual Guidance:** Receiving guidance from priests and spiritual directors provided essential support in faith development. Many referred to podcasts such as Bible in a Year, Catechism in a Year, Word on Fire, Upfront with the Archbishop, Pillar, etc. as important for nurturing faith.

### **Challenges and Growth**

1. **Overcoming Difficulties:** Many look to God for help in times of crisis or challenges. Facing and overcoming personal strife often brought individuals closer to God.
2. **Witnessing Struggles:** Observing others' struggles, and how they relied on their faith in doing so, inspired personal faith growth in others.

### **Role of Community – Parish, Diocese and Universities/Colleges: Insights on the Importance of Community and Parish Involvement in Faith Formation.**

Dr. Matt Hoven's talk emphasized the vital role that Catholic institutions such as Saint Mary's University, Newman Theological College, and St. Joseph's College play in preparing teachers for Catholic schools. His reflection questions prompted participants to identify the strengths and gaps in the current approach to teacher formation.

### **University and Theological College Engagement**

Catholic educational institutions including Saint Mary's University, Newman Theological College, and St. Joseph's College (University of Alberta) are integral to the faith formation of teachers for Catholic schools in Alberta. They offer programs for theological and pedagogical education, as well as spiritual direction, which must be a vital part of mentorship and formation of new teachers.

Content of Formation:

## Summary of Undergraduate Education Recommendations from Participants:

1. **Balanced Education:** Postsecondary schools need to balance intellectual and spiritual education. All post secondary undergraduate institutions should incorporate courses on apologetics, catechesis, pedagogy, etc., and take responsibility for teacher faith formation, but that formation should be more than just knowledge. A well-formed faith includes a spirituality and relationship with Jesus. Educational institutions, Catholic and public, and the programs they offer, must balance mental health, loneliness, and a sense of belonging into the students' faith formation experience.
2. **Formation Courses:** Catholic educational institutions and organizations – such as school divisions, ACSTA, CCSSA, and the Bishops – must insist that all universities, including secular universities (Alberta, McEwan, Concordia, Kings, Calgary, and Lethbridge) include theological formation and Catholic pedagogy courses as approved or optional courses for Bachelor of Education degrees.  
Four-Year Degree: Develop a four-year degree in Catholic education formation for undergraduates and encourage faculties of education to provide the necessary path for students to prepare for teaching in Catholic schools.
3. **Credentials:** Currently some boards offer financial incentives for the completion of certificate programs in Catholic education. The Catholic education leadership must negotiate with the province and ATA special credentials and recognition such as a "7th year on grid" or special certificate programs to all teachers, which could include non-Catholics, in specialized formation. To engage ATA, other divisions can create their own specialized programs to encourage ATA and provincial public boards to support this.
4. **Required Certification:** Many participants deemed the Scottish experience of requiring Catholic education certification for teaching in Catholic schools a reasonable requirement and make coursework in Catholic education mandatory as part of an undergraduate program. Some participants suggested a fifth year requirement to teach in Catholic schools. For certification to work it would need to be manageable within the current realities of teacher faith formation and the lives, and finances, of students.
5. **Pre-Service Formation:** Acknowledge that the two religious education courses required by some boards in Alberta is a good start but not sufficient to create a foundation in faith and knowledge for pre-service teachers and establish a minimum requirement that could be required prior to offering a continuous teaching contract.
6. **Bursaries:** School divisions must prioritize faith formation and actively recruit, provide bursaries, create opportunities, and create policies to attract, recruit, and retain prospective teachers.
7. **Division Expectations and Teacher Influence:** While recognizing there are challenges in influencing teachers and encouraging teacher faith formation divisions can, by clearly articulating, and putting into practice by hiring, ongoing faith formation is a leadership expectation. One example discussed was making a graduate certificate in Catholic education a minimum for school leadership and Master's in Catholic education for Superintendent.

- 8. Practicing Faith/ Parish Experience:** Encourage undergraduates to gain experiences in their parish and involvement in ministries by including this as an expectation on websites, teacher information sessions at universities. Consider including a service component to both the undergraduate certificate programs (St. Joseph's College) and/or prior to continuous contract. Ideally, all undergraduates and leadership candidates should be practicing Catholics and open to a learning journey with Jesus Christ. Creating a mentorship model with both undergraduate students and newly hired teachers to "walk with" our teachers.

## **Addressing Gaps and Challenges**

There are notable gaps in accessible faith formation for all university students across the province. Also, a balance must be struck between formal courses and flexible, meaningful activities that encourage deeper commitment (retreats, pilgrimages, etc.). Online courses, while convenient, may not fully capture the communal essence of faith formation. The Catholic community often relies too heavily on school divisions for teacher faith formation instead of actively engaging and supporting these initiatives.

## **Role of Bishops and Parishes**

Bishops need to be visibly and actively involved in schools, providing vision and support. They should help foster relationships with Jesus, guide teachers in faith transmission, and ensure teachers understand the bishops' pastoral roles. Bishops should also oversee and act as resources for Catholic schools, offering clear expectations and support for teacher faith formation. (See Canon Law 793-806 and *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022))

While all members of the Catholic education community acknowledge that active parish involvement is vital to the spiritual growth of all Catholic and essential aspects of faith formation of Catholic educators, the ideal is rarely meant and can be a source of frustration by the parish. Many priests and parishioners take issue with lack of Sunday attendance by teachers and students and question the value of the schools. Despite this, and with the support of enthusiastic parishes, parish priests can play a critical role through invitation, providing spiritual guidance, and being open to honest dialogue with teachers about their participation in parish life. Teachers are expected to live a faith-filled life, which includes regular Mass attendance and participation in parish activities and retreats.

## **Parish and School Collaboration**

Parishes must proactively engage with schools within their boundaries, inviting teachers to ministry training, committees (e.g., CWL, Knights of Columbus, parish council), retreats, and bible studies. The relationship between parishes

and schools should be re-evaluated for mutual benefit, with parishes leading teachers to Christ through vibrant and authentic engagement.

Parish priests would benefit from annual presentations on best practices in working with schools in their parishes and professional development on the nature and mission of publicly funded Catholic education<sup>4</sup>. With the influx of international priests into Alberta, NWT and Yukon, cultural formation for priests into Western Canadian society and the church's role in the schools would be beneficial.

## Practical Recommendations

1. **Parish Priests and Deacons in Schools:** Priests and deacons are busy and have much going on. Some clerics have a natural way of working with schools and children, others are gifted in other areas. Whenever possible, priests and deacons, working with division and school leaders, should build relationships with school staff and students beyond liturgical roles, becoming integral members of the school community to the best of their abilities. Priests and deacons should be well known to students and staff, accepted as part of the fabric of the school, and always invited and welcomed into the schools and to participate in activities. Hospitality must extend both ways with schools being welcomed and students “at home” in the parish. Having the priest play sports with the kids at noon can have a tremendous impact on the lives of kids and the work of Catholic schools.
2. **Growing in Faith (and other) Resources:** Parishes should maximize the use of available resources like the *Growing in Faith* program. The program has excellent parent and parish resources that tend to be underutilized by both priests and parishes. Priests and deacons should receive training on the program and the available resources. Many parishes also have access to online resources such as FORMED that could provide teachers with another source of material.
3. **Teachers and Parishes:** Many participants suggested that both colleges and school boards encourage students and teachers to volunteer in parishes as part of their professional development and experience working in a Catholic environment. Activities including youth ministry, Sunday school, sacramental preparation programs, participating as lectors and extraordinary ministers of communion, RCIA, bible studies and service experiences with St. Vincent de Paul Society all would be seen as advantageous when looking for work in Catholic schools and a goal for professional growth plans.

Participants believed that fostering a robust partnership between parishes, universities, bishops, and schools, the Catholic community, priest and parishioners, can significantly enhance the faith formation of its educators.

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<sup>4</sup> Great resource: Mulligan, J. (2015) *A Pastor's Journal: Catholic parishes and schools working together*. Toronto, Novalis.

## **Educational Approaches**

Best practices and innovative approaches in Catholic education highlighted during the symposium.

Throughout the presentations, discussions, and in the comments and data gathered, many participants shared personal experiences and reflections on Catholic education, the vital role of Catholic teachers, their sources of inspiration, and where they find strength and support. This section provides a sampling and compilation of the more common responses:

## **The Nature of Catholic Teachers: The Heart of Catholic Education**

### **Core Principles**

- “The heart of Catholic Education is the heart of the Catholic Teacher”: Teachers must come to recognize that relationships are the core of Catholic education; Catholic education lies in the relationship between teachers and students and fostering an environment where students feel loved and trusted. Catholic education, and their teachers, must emphasize that students are the focus, not just subjects to be taught. Teachers primarily are witnesses and mentors; that is the priority of formation.
- “Vocation, Not Just a Job”: Catholic teaching is, and must be seen, as a vocation, a calling, rather than merely a job. Teachers must recognize and embrace the privilege of teaching in a faith-filled, pastoral environment. Catholic schools are not just another worksite, we are on holy ground. Vocations, and teachers’ realization of the role, takes time to grow and must be nurtured.

### **Expectations and Responsibilities of Being a Teacher in a Catholic School**

- Understanding Expectations: Catholic School divisions working with teachers need to reflect and dialogue, at least with some understanding, of what is expected in the role of Catholic teacher and their responsibilities as faith witness in a Catholic school. Both the division leadership and the staff must support and witness the beliefs of the Catholic faith, and that this is a privilege, not a burden.
- Willingness to Teach in Catholic Schools: Priority must be given to hire teachers who genuinely want to teach in Catholic schools, rather than those who see it as a last resort. Remind new teachers that they are the heart of the Catholic school, emphasizing their role and importance. Teacher initiation, through celebration and formation, in Catholic education is vital.
- Visible Faith Leaders: Catholic education staff, including teachers, must live out their faith visibly, sharing who they are fully as witnesses of their beliefs. Parents, administrators, teachers, and students need to see faith models both in school, at the parish, and in the community.

## **Personal and Professional Development**

- **Ongoing Faith Formation:** School divisions and the church must encourage ongoing faith formation for teachers, specifically emphasizing the need to know, love, and embody their faith ("Know it, love it, ooze it") in their classrooms, extracurricular, and personal lives. Teachers should be open to learning, growing, and enhancing their relationship with God.
- **Engaged in a Rich Parish Life:** Ideally, all involved in Catholic education should actively participate in parish life and integrate their faith into their daily lives and professional roles. The parish must be the central and vibrant community in the lives of all Catholics.

## **Inspirational and Engaging Teaching**

- **Inspire and Ignite Faith and Learning:** Teachers should aim to inspire and ignite their students' faith, provide and engage them in meaningful encounters with Christ, in a safe and caring environment. All educational activities should be rooted in Christ, acknowledging that everything is possible with God.
- **Pastoral Nature of Catholic Education:** All education must have a pastoral nature providing holistic support and guidance in their personal, social, and emotional development. Catholic education can go further in the pastoral nature of teaching, engaging a spiritual tradition where teachers act as shepherds of children and stewards of the church, feeling no shame, embarrassment, or hesitation in their roles and aiming for human flourishing in light of the message of Christ.

## **Guidelines and Support**

- **Teaching Grounded in the Theology of Ministry:** Teachers should have a solid understanding of the theology of ministry and pastoral ministry guidelines of the Church, speaking the truth with love and participating in some form of regular spiritual guidance.
- **Catholic Teachers Must Understand Core Christian Beliefs:** Ensure that teachers have a deep understanding of Jesus' teachings and gospel values, grasping the crux of the Catholic faith, and life of love that flows from these beliefs. Knowledge alone of beliefs is meaningless unless put into action.
- **Faith Formation is Lifelong:** School divisions must understand that faith formation is a lifelong journey, that is approached with an attitude of invitation and encouragement, not force. Teachers must be comfortable with their role as faith leaders and be open to admitting when they don't have all the answers, struggle with teachings of the Church, and trust in God's guidance.

# Strategies for the Implementation of Faith Formation

To create a deeply relational, faith-filled, and supportive environment, Catholic schools can empower teachers to serve as both educators and inspiring faith leaders, guiding students in both academic and spiritual growth.

Participants shared extensive data, examples, and advice on practical strategies for Catholic teacher faith formation. This information was compiled and categorized, highlighting distinct approaches at the provincial, division, and school levels. The resulting recommendations for implementation are as follows:

## Provincial Initiatives for Strengthening Catholic Education in Alberta For Provincial/Territorial Policymakers

Faith formation and Catholic education will only thrive in an environment of freedom and transparency. A system under attack tends to build walls and withdraw. Catholic education needs to engage and be seen as a viable system of choice in Alberta. Organizations such as ACSTA, CCSSA, GrACE, Alberta/NWT Bishops Conference and Catholic ATA Locals need to be working together to strengthen the protection for, and excellence of, Catholic education. Policy recommendations by participants to support and protect Catholic education through strong faith formation of teachers.

### Vision and Goals

- **Present a United Front for Catholic Education:** Catholic divisions across Alberta must collaborate under a united plan, similar to the EXCEL<sup>5</sup> initiative, that uses research-based material, experts (academics, educators, etc.) to devise faith formation programs for use across the region. This collaboration should transcend individual divisions and schools to create a cohesive and supportive provincial network.
- **Provincial Research Group/Institute:** The establishment of an institute (similar to Institute for Catholic Education in Ontario) associated with an existing college or university to oversee, fund, and supervise Catholic education research in Alberta/NWT/ Yukon.
- **Catholic Teacher Faith Formation Must be Christ-Centered and Rooted in Pedagogy of Jesus:** All teacher faith formation initiatives must emphasize Christ-centered education, drawing from the pedagogy of Jesus to guide all educational practices and policies. Catholic educators need to be familiar with

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<sup>5</sup> The Excellence in Catholic Educational Leader Academy (ExCEL Academy) is a joint partnership between STAR, Evergreen, Elk Island Catholic, and Lakeland School Divisions and Newman Theological College.

- the rich education tradition of the Church and the documents provided through the Congregation for Catholic Education (now Dicastery for Culture and Education) including the Directory for Catechesis.
- **Strong Response to the Shortage of (Catholic) Teachers:** All divisions across our region are experiencing a decline in the number of applicants with rural divisions often in desperate situations. Catholic teachers are even scarcer. United action in hiring Catholic teachers is necessary especially for the small, rural boards. Collaborating in hiring and faith formation is necessary to ensure a strong vibrant Catholic education across western Canada. It is vital that rural locations receive adequate incentives to attract and retain teachers. This may have national and international implications.
  - **Greater Provincial and Interprovincial Networks and Collaboration:** Strengthen provincial networks such as ACSTA, CCSSA, REN, REMEC, and GrACE and our Catholic post-secondary educational partners. Include collaboration with other provinces like Ontario and Saskatchewan to share resources, ideas, and best practices. Encourage CCSTA to provide national leadership in protecting and expanding the rights to Catholic education and the holding of a National Catholic Education Forum as in the past.

## Key Actions

- **Leadership and Governance:**
  - Strong provincial leadership is crucial for the success of this initiative. Without the course and initiative of leadership: Bishops, Trustees, and Superintendents, this will languish. Unless this is seen as a priority, financial priority especially, this will not move forward.
  - ACSTA and CCSSA must establish a living document that outlines the initiative's goals and strategies, ensuring it remains adaptable and relevant. This document could include a foundational statement on Catholic teacher formation, minimum expectations for teachers and leaders, priorities for implementation of provincial strategies, policy templates for each division and wording for division foundation policies around expectation and realization of the goals of teacher faith formation and Catholic education.
  - Engage with ACSTA and CCSSA to advocate for a common Catholic teacher and leadership qualification standard at the provincial level. Currently CCSSA has created documents in support of teacher and leader qualifications, but this should be more than an addition to existing resources. Provincial government must understand the vital role Catholic education plays in this province and more than 25% of students and teachers are engaged in Catholic education.
- **Formation and Professional Development:**
  - Provincial campaign to highlight the need for Catholic educators and outreach to youth still in high school regarding the needs and expectations of a Catholic educator and leader.

- Some divisions provide financial and professional development opportunities for Catholic faith formation including Incentives like in-division grid increases. Having teachers complete Catholic education programs/certificates can ensure robust faith formation for teachers across all divisions in Alberta/NWT/Yukon. This might include adding an extra (or specialization) year on the grid for Catholic teacher faith formation and make the program accessible to all teachers in the province (To clarify – the special year may include certificates in Catholic education, outdoor education, CTS specialties, leadership, and other professional learning beyond a bachelor's or master's degree).
- Create a common faith formation program curriculum with consistent expectations and standards across all divisions. Within this curriculum there must be some flexibility for local needs and resources but for accountability and consistency there needs to be minimum standards including content, academic expectations, and accredited instructional resources.
- **Symposiums and Regular Events:**
  - Organize regular symposiums/conferences focusing on different aspects of Catholic education to foster continuous professional development and idea exchange among educators. Provide professional development credit for completion of courses and attendance at events.
- **Resource Development and Sharing:**
  - Working with Catholic education leaders and teachers, develop and distribute resources for Catholic teachers to aid in the integration and permeation of the curriculum with Catholic values, teaching, and examples. Catholic social teaching could be integrated into social studies, language learning, and science.
- **Political Advocacy and Public Awareness:**
  - Apply both private and public pressure on Alberta universities and Faculties of Education to offer Catholic education faith formation courses within the program of studies for teacher education. Catholic education courses should not be extras to an education degree but available as part of the degree, especially courses on Catholic education pedagogy.
  - Leverage the current government, professional college, and department of education to create policies and/or legislation protecting Catholic education by promoting the formation of well formed Catholic-educated teachers.

- **University Partnerships and Course Offerings:**

- Currently the University of Alberta (St. Joseph's College) and St. Mary's University have privileged opportunities to offer courses and incorporate Catholic education courses. More needs to be done to assist and encourage the other six degree granting institutions in opening their degree programs to courses from St. Mary's and St. Joseph's College.
- Support universities that are offering faith formation programs, assist them by providing courses, well formed instructors, and research possibilities to encourage other institutions to develop similar offerings. Partnerships with degree granting institutions can lead to greater cooperation and participation than legislation.
- Advocate for undergraduate courses in Catholic theology, Catholic pedagogy, and spirituality to be included as part of education degree requirements. Encourage service oriented program and course offerings.

- **Evaluation and Standards:**

- Working with educational research institutions, develop a framework for tracking and evaluating the success of faith formation programs by sponsoring and funding projects to study long-term trends in Catholic education.
- Working together, establish a provincial minimum standard for faith formation, ensuring consistency and high expectations across all divisions in Alberta, NWT and Yukon. Creating authentic standards, identifying key areas of study and creating courses provides university partners a blueprint and template for engaging with Catholic trustees and school divisions on teacher faith formation.

- **Community and Parish Involvement:**

- The entire faith community is responsible for the faith formation of our teachers and schools. Starting at the top with provincial bishops working closely with ACSTA and CCSSA, to diocesan educational councils, vicars for education, and school division leadership, the church must be seen as the lifelong educational community in faith formation.
- Encourage parishes to pray for and dedicate masses to the Catholic schools they serve. The parish priest is a valuable asset to the faith formation of teachers as much as students. Their invitation to faith and sacrament can have profound effects. Working with Bishops, ACSTA and CCSSA, priests must be formed in their role as witnesses to faith in Catholic schools.

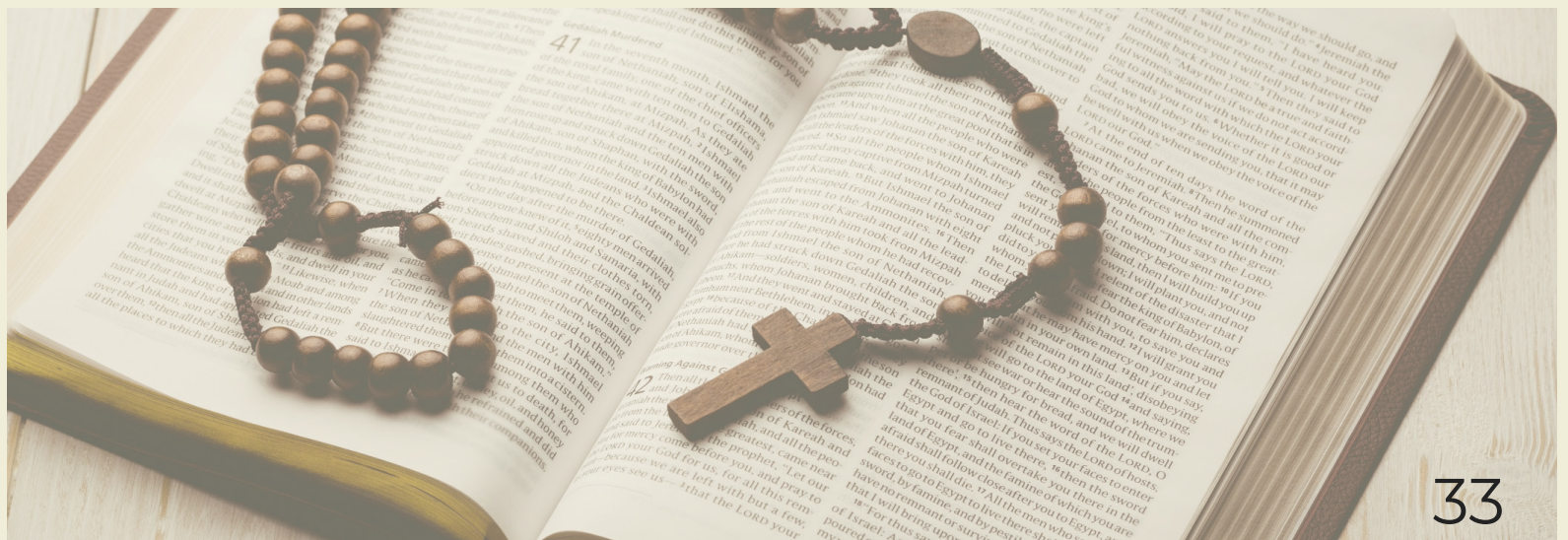
- Involve all stakeholders, including the school community, in supporting and advocating for Catholic education. The work of fraternal organizations such as Knights of Columbus and Catholic Women's League has been essential in the growth and support of Catholic education in the past. Development and Peace, St. Vincent de Paul, and other organizations have a role in Catholic schools.

# What can Trustees do?

## Role of School Trustees in Supporting Spiritual Formation

School trustees play a crucial role in ensuring that spiritual formation is a priority within Catholic school divisions. As stewards of Catholic education, trustees are responsible for upholding and promoting the faith-based mission of the schools they serve. Their leadership and advocacy can significantly influence the quality and availability of spiritual formation opportunities for teachers and staff.

- **Advocate for Resources:** Trustees have the important role of allocating budgetary resources to prioritize spiritual formation programs. By ensuring adequate funding for retreats, professional development, mentorship initiatives, and pilgrimages, they can profoundly support the spiritual growth of educators, nurturing their connection to God and each other.
- **Set Strategic Direction:** In guiding the school division's strategic direction, trustees can align goals and policies with the vibrant mission of Catholic education. By championing the integration of spiritual formation into the educational framework, they affirm its essential role in the division's success and sustainability, creating a strong foundation for future generations.





- **Foster a Faith-Focused Culture:** Leading by example, trustees can participate in spiritual formation activities, actively promoting a culture of faith within the division. Their visible commitment to spiritual growth serves as an inspiration, encouraging staff and the broader school community to deepen their own faith journeys and experience the joy of living out their beliefs.
- **Build Partnerships:** Trustees can collaborate with local parishes, dioceses, and Catholic organizations to enhance resources and support for spiritual formation. By fostering these meaningful relationships, they can enrich the quality and variety of opportunities available to teachers and staff, creating a vibrant community of faith.
- **Ensure Accountability:** Trustees play a crucial role in ensuring that the division's mission and vision are reflected in the daily life of the schools. By establishing expectations for spiritual formation and monitoring program effectiveness, they uphold a strong Catholic identity, ensuring that faith remains at the heart of the educational experience.

By actively engaging in these areas, school trustees can help cultivate an environment where spiritual formation is cherished and supported, contributing to the flourishing of both educators and students in Catholic schools. Together, they can inspire a vibrant community rooted in faith, hope, and love.

## Long-Term Vision

These are suggestions for future directions provided by participants:

- **Unified Framework:** Establish a unified framework across the province for baseline expectations in Catholic education, raising the bar for all.
- **Provincial Teacher Preparation School:** Explore the possibility of a provincial teacher preparation school modeled after the Scottish system.
- **ATA Council:** Create an ATA council for Catholic school teachers to have some autonomy over curriculum development, ensuring intentional permeation of Catholic values.
- **Catholic Education for All:** Emphasize that Catholic education benefits all of Alberta, fostering a society rooted in faith, reason, and a commitment to building the Kingdom of God.

By implementing these actions, Alberta can create a robust and unified Catholic education system that supports teachers, engages communities, and enriches the spiritual and academic lives of students.

## For School Divisions: Divisional and Administrative Initiatives for Enhancing Catholic Education

Participants provided many suggestions, some based on their current school divisions, some on what they've heard other school divisions are doing, and some are strictly aspirational or things they would like to see. The following are suggestions categorized by most mentioned.

### Hiring and Professional Development

- **Division Faith Orientation Program:** Develop a comprehensive orientation program for new teachers, emphasizing the vocational nature of Catholic teaching. Include faith formation sessions in the onboarding process to help new teachers understand and embrace their role. This is not a one off but an ongoing systematic orientation that engages and educates new teachers into the essence of Catholicism and Catholic education.
- **Hire Formed Catholic Teachers:** Ideally Catholic schools divisions should prioritize hiring teachers who are already formed in Catholic theology and practice. This starts long before the new teacher sends out resumes and includes vocation discernment, undergraduate programs, student teachers, and hiring expectations. It's essential to emphasize the importance of theology and active participation in the Catholic faith throughout the hiring process.
- **Faithful Leadership:** Ensure that school leaders, including principals, are knowledgeable about the faith, strong witnesses, and effective teachers of teachers in faith. Leaders must be fully formed or willing to be fully formed, potentially through certification programs, in order to witness to the witnesses.

Just as formation in leadership through LQS is an expectation so too should be faith formation for Catholic school leadership.

- **Professional Development:** Faith formation should be an essential aspect of professional development within a Catholic school division. It must be ongoing, relevant, and reflective. Some examples offered included:
  - Embed professional development (PD) within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on Friday afternoons. Establish Catholic Learning Communities (CLCs) specifically for faith-based professional development.
  - Encourage participation in faith-based groups such as RMEC and involve teachers in synod processes, parent engagement activities, and faith surveys.

### Faith Formation and Vision

- **Clear Vision and Faith Plan:** Administrative policy must include a vision and plan for ongoing faith formation for all staff. Each division, if not in place, must develop and communicate a clear vision and faith plan for the division. School leaders must prominently hold and share this vision, ensuring it guides all educational practices, and central to the community that gathers at that school.
- **Invitation to Growth:** While faith formation is essential it must be an inviting and engaging process through activities such as symposiums, and initiatives like Blueprints, SPICE, CCO, Alpha, and What Man Are You? Staff declining the invitation repeatedly need to enter into dialogue with leadership and consider alternate employment.
- **Faith Formation Plans:** Just as teachers, as professionals, require ongoing professional formation, Catholic witnesses too would benefit from a well reflected on and coherent plan. Work with staff to design and implement a personalized faith formation plan for each teacher, tailored to their specific needs and career stage.
- **Ongoing Formation:** A one day faith day, while a great community builder and opportunity to celebrate together, is not faith formation. Each division must provide resources and opportunities for continuous faith formation for all Catholic teachers, ensuring they expand their understanding of Catholic teachings and practices.

### Accountability and Mentorship

- **Faith Accountability:** Catholic schools and teachers, both legally and morally, are expected to maintain and engage in the authenticity and mission of the division and the Church. Teachers and schools must be responsible for the gift of faith and to Catholic teachings in their personal lives and professional conduct. While faith is a journey and people grow at and discern at different paces engaging with teachers in dialogue related to faith-related questions may challenge teachers to grow in their faith.

- Many divisions already conduct regular self-evaluations and assessments of Catholic schools, such as the Catholic School Reviews in Elk Island Catholic Schools. Implementing regular assessments to ensure that schools, leaders, and teachers meet their responsibilities as Catholic educators is essential. A feedback loop with the local bishop's office is also recommended to provide oversight and support, ensuring alignment with Church teachings and expectations. This collaboration would help identify areas for growth and celebrate successes.
- Use feedback from students, parents, and peers to continuously improve faith formation programs and support systems.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish faith mentorship programs and workshops to support teachers. Budgeting and planning should reflect faith priorities, including dedicated time for faith development activities. Create mentorship programs where experienced faith leaders guide new teachers in their spiritual and professional journeys. Provide access to spiritual directors or guides for ongoing personal and professional spiritual support
- **Leadership Requirements:** For leadership positions, require coursework through Newman or an equivalent institution, along with pastoral and character references attesting to the candidate's ability to be a faith leader. Encourage pursuing a master's in religious education for leadership roles.

### Community and Parish Involvement

- **Parish/Faith Community Connections:** Ideally staff should be connected to a parish, or another faith community if non-Catholic, for support and guidance. Divisions must ensure all leadership positions, including school based, maintain a strong connection with their local school parish(es) and engage parishes to pray for and support Catholic schools in their area.
- **Parent and Student Engagement:** Whenever possible foster engagement in the school from parents and students through surveys, feedback mechanisms, and involvement in faith-based activities and processes.

### Faith Integration in Education

- **Faith-Centered Learning:** Integrate faith formation across all levels of education, particularly focusing on new teachers entering the profession. Consider provisions for teachers with long tenures to ensure ongoing faith development.
- **Inspirational Teaching:** Inspire students through the visible faith and vocation of their teachers. Schools should aim to open the door to vocations through compelling faith formation.
- **Curriculum Professional Development and Faith Formation:** Recent curriculum innovations and resources are excellent opportunities for teacher formation and faith development. Thorough exploration, prayer and

celebration during professional development for the new religion programs offers opportunity for faith formation.

### **Best Practices and Innovations**

- **Personal Visits:** Best practices by senior administration and division staff could include personal visits by the district director of Catholic education to probationary teachers to answer questions and develop a commitment to Catholic education. By fostering relationships between central office staff and school based staff that includes a faith component and emphasizing the vocational aspect of teaching in presentations, meetings, and personal discussions, teachers can witness the faith leadership and witness of division staff.
- **Creative Support:** Encourage divisions to be creative in helping teachers meet faith formation expectations, finding innovative ways to integrate faith development into their professional lives. Unique opportunities for faith discussions such as Theology on Tap, Faith Cafes, pilgrimages, bible study, etc.
- **School Board Faith Results Accountability:** Assurance plans must include faith outcomes and activities. Trustees must demand accountability for faith formation outcomes, not just academic performance such as PATs and Diploma results.

### **Summary**

These initiatives aim to build a robust framework for Catholic education in Alberta, ensuring that teachers and leaders are well-formed in their faith and that this faith permeates all aspects of the educational experience. By fostering a culture of continuous faith development, engagement, and accountability, Catholic divisions can create an inspiring and effective environment for both educators and students.

### **For Local Schools: Where Faith Meets Pedagogy Daily**

These were provided by participants as best practices and professional development recommendations for teachers and schools. These points highlight the essence and practices of Catholic schools:

- **Catholic Schools and a Culture of Prayer:** Central to Catholic education is fostering a culture and school climate where prayer is integrated into daily life of the school, shaping both individual spirituality and collective ethos of all members of the school community.
- **Identity Beyond Symbols:** More than a Cross on the Wall, Catholic schools distinguish themselves not just through physical symbols like crosses, posters, and a chapel but through a comprehensive embodiment of Catholic principles and values in their educational approach. The charism of the school must be clear and palpable.

- **Staff Connection to Local Parish:** While often teachers do not live in the same parish as their schools, staff must try on occasion to visit the local parish, especially for sacraments, special events, school masses. Staff must be encouraged to engage in active participation in parish/church life – both their own parish or faith community and, if possible, that of the local school parish, fostering a strong connection between school and parish. Organize events that bring together teachers, students, parents, and parishioners to build a cohesive faith community.
- **Teacher as Witness:** Do teachers fully grasp the importance of their vocation? Teachers must be formed and reminded of the role of witness and their part in the mission of the church. Teachers are expected to exemplify strong faith and moral character, acting as role models for students and colleagues alike.
- **Facilitating Difficult Conversations:** Life can be messy, and when faith, personal belief, and life are involved the lives and experiences of all people can get complicated. Administrators often become the school contact for these difficult experiences whether health, relationship, or faith. Administrators need to be formed in and addressing difficult issues and where there is less than adequate understanding of the role of Catholic teachers inviting staff to faith. Effective leadership in Catholic schools involves fostering environments where difficult conversations about faith can occur openly and constructively among staff.
- **School's Supporting Teachers' Faith:** Teachers need institutional support to confidently integrate their faith into their professional roles, viewing teaching not just as a job but as a vocation. Adequate access to funds, resources, and events is essential.
- **Teacher Mentorship:** Schools should provide mentorship programs, in concert with division leadership, access to spiritual tools, and encourage regular participation in Mass to nurture teachers' faith and teaching practices.
- **Pastoral Leadership:** School leaders should adopt a pastoral approach, cultivating relationships that prioritize faith formation alongside academic content, ensuring a holistic education. Much work has been done on servant leadership that highlights the pastor role of administration. Are leaders formed with an understanding of pastoral leadership?
- **Role of Chaplains:** There has been a decrease in the number of chaplains in recent years in some divisions. Some schools prioritize chaplains who support staff and leadership, integrating faith formation seamlessly into the

educational mission. Chaplaincy can have a tremendous impact on the school and the staff.

## Summary

These elements collectively underline how Catholic schools aim to imbue every aspect of their community with faith and moral teachings, nurturing both the spiritual and academic growth of students and educators.

## Final Thoughts - Embracing Faith Formation in a Changing World

Navigating belief in today's diverse landscape can be challenging, but it also presents an incredible opportunity for growth and renewal. While many who practice their faith may feel the pressures of competing beliefs, Catholicism offers a profound vision of human flourishing that inspires us to celebrate and embody this fullness of life. Those who encounter the living Christ are called to share their hope, joy, and resilience with others.

Catholic school divisions, in partnership with the Church and the broader Catholic community, have a vital role in nurturing the faith formation of both preservice and current teachers. As Paul VI reminded us (1975), the evangelized become the next generation of evangelists. It is crucial for our community to cultivate future educators who can effectively carry out the mission and vision of the Church.

By collaborating with theological institutions and educational organizations, Catholic school divisions can create rich opportunities for teachers to explore their faith, theology, and spirituality. This journey toward meaning and fulfillment encourages us to gather in community, fostering connections that inspire and uplift.

Catholic schools, and the staff who work in them, are a vital part of the mission of the Church. These schools require dedicated witnesses to fulfil this mission. Together, Catholic educational leadership can foster an environment where faith formation flourishes, empowering teachers to inspire their students and communities.

# Future Directions: Suggestions for future symposiums and ongoing initiatives in Catholic education.

## **Develop Provincial, Divisional, and School-Level Self-Assessment Tools:**

- Create assessment tools to facilitate self-reflection and ensure alignment with faith formation goals at each organizational level.
- Engage stakeholders, including REN, CCSSA, Bishops, and Trustees, to develop materials applicable across Western Canada, ensuring consistency and effectiveness in faith formation practices.

## **Establish a Western Canada Catholic Education Research Institute:**

- Explore establishing a dedicated research institute or partnering with an existing institution, such as St. Joseph's College, Newman Theological College, or St. Mary's University, to create a center for Catholic educational research.
- This center would serve as a hub for research, training, and distribution of resources on faith formation practices, facilitating data-driven improvements and supporting academic growth in the field.

## **Create a Centralized Database of Best Practices and Resources:**

- Collaborate with system leaders and academics to compile a database of effective faith formation practices, tools, and key contacts that can be accessed by divisions and schools across Western Canada.
- This database would serve as a living resource for ongoing support and reference, helping to streamline efforts and enhance the impact of faith formation initiatives.

## **Pilot Projects for Faith Formation Effectiveness:**

- Implement pilot projects to evaluate the effectiveness of new faith formation strategies, allowing educators to test, refine, and share practices based on real-world outcomes.
- Use these pilot studies to generate evidence-based recommendations for broader application, strengthening the quality of faith formation.

## **Establish Minimum Foundations for Educators' Faith Formation:**

- In partnership with ACSTA and CCSSA, develop and recommend a foundational framework of coursework, spiritual practices, and ongoing faith formation for all Catholic educators, including staff and leadership.
- This framework would ensure educators possess the knowledge and commitment necessary to guide students in both academic and spiritual growth.

### **Host Biannual Reviews and Gatherings for Continuous Improvement:**

- Organize biannual gatherings of key stakeholders—Bishops, system leaders, teachers, consultants, and academics—to assess progress, share insights, and plan future initiatives.
- Use these gatherings to update this document, keep the faith formation strategy dynamic, and sustain momentum for ongoing development.

### **Encourage Continuous Professional Development and Community Engagement:**

- Establish regular professional development opportunities and community-building activities to support educators' personal faith journeys and professional roles as faith leaders.
- Ensure faith formation remains a vibrant, integral part of the school culture by encouraging collaboration and spiritual growth within the educator community.

# Insights from the Author: Recommendations and Reflections on Teacher Faith Formation

The following recommendations with reflections aimed at enhancing teacher faith formation based on the work of the symposium, including recommendations from participants and further research.

## 1. Prioritizing Teacher Faith Formation for Well-Being and Community Renewal

Catholic school divisions and their leadership should prioritize the ongoing faith formation of their staff as a key strategic and operational objective. Effective faith formation can rejuvenate and support teachers, promoting not only their spiritual and mental well-being but also the overall health of the school community. Faith formation activities can feel more like an obligation, but when approached thoughtfully, it is a source of personal and professional growth that enhances the teaching vocation.

- **Recommendation:** Faith formation should be integrated into the daily life of the school division, making it accessible and meaningful for teachers amid their busy schedules. By encouraging and inviting faith formation in professional growth plans and providing diverse opportunities—such as retreats, courses, and spiritual practices—school divisions demonstrate their commitment to supporting staff holistically.
  - **Reflection:** Teachers who feel spiritually supported are more engaged, resilient, and able to embody the mission of Catholic education. They become not only educators but also witnesses and leaders in their communities. When faith formation is prioritized, it nurtures a critical mass of educators who can authentically live out and promote the values and goals of Catholic education, thus enriching the entire school environment.
- **Recommendation:** For Catholic schools to thrive, it is essential that all staff members, from trustees to classroom teachers, understand and embrace the unique mission of Catholic education. This commitment should be reflected in the strategic and operational priorities of the division, ensuring that faith formation is not just an expectation but a transformative and integral part of the educational experience.
  - **Reflection:** By creating a supportive environment where faith formation is celebrated and accessible, Catholic school divisions can foster a vibrant, mission-driven community that thrives spiritually and academically. This, in turn, strengthens the overall well-being of both educators and students, reinforcing the distinctiveness and value of Catholic education.

## 2. Forming Catholic Educators: Integrating Faith and Social Justice for a Holistic Mission

Catholic teacher formation must move beyond purely theological education and engage with the broader mission of the Church, including social justice and the proclamation of the kerygma (Good News). Effective faith formation programs should equip both pre- and in-service teachers with the knowledge and tools to engage meaningfully with Catholics and non-Catholics, as well as supporters and critics of Catholic education. To fully realize the mission of Catholic education, teacher faith formation must address contemporary issues in society such as environmental crises, human rights, and social justice, providing a framework for educators to navigate these topics in their own lives and with their students.

- **Recommendation:** Teacher faith formation should not just impart knowledge but also cultivate witnesses who can authentically embody and communicate the faith. Programs should be designed to invite and inspire educators and students alike, connecting them to the awe and wonder of the transcendent. This approach aligns with Pope Francis' emphasis on encounter, accompaniment, and dialogue, as well as his commitment to the Church's social teachings.
  - **Reflection:** The challenges faced by Catholic educators today require an integrated formation that combines academic rigor with practical engagement. Religious education must create spaces for reflection and dialogue, encouraging educators and students to explore life's fundamental questions and seek meaning in a world often marked by division and conflict. Addressing generative themes such as climate change, mental health, and social justice can ignite deeper conversations and inspire transformative action.
- **Recommendation:** For formation to be truly effective, it requires the collaboration of all stakeholders—school divisions, superintendents, trustees, bishops, and educational institutions. Post-secondary institutions including St. Joseph's College, Newman Theological College, and St. Mary's University play a critical role in developing programs that are both theologically sound and relevant to the lived experiences of teachers. Catholic education in Alberta would benefit from a coordinated effort to build capacity in theological and interdisciplinary studies, ensuring that teachers have access to the resources and support they need to thrive.
  - **Reflection:** This collaborative approach should be guided by a Christocentric focus, rooted in the mission and teachings of the Church. Teachers must be equipped to be not only educators but also strive to be witnesses and disciples, modelling a faith that is lived and active. The pedagogical formation of Catholic teachers should reflect this vision, integrating modern educational methods with the richness of the Church's intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Ultimately, the formation of Catholic educators is an investment in the future of the Church and society. It must be comprehensive, addressing both the spiritual and professional needs of teachers. By fostering a well-rounded, mission-driven approach to education, Catholic schools can continue to be places of transformation and hope, where faith and learning intersect to form not just good students but compassionate, just, and engaged citizens.

## **Nourishing the Spirit: The Importance of Spiritual Formation for Catholic Educators**

Catholic teachers need opportunities for personal and communal spiritual growth. Faith formation must go beyond academic learning and foster practices that deepen their relationship with Christ and the community. Spiritual formation is not just about theology but about nurturing a vibrant faith life that sustains educators in their vocation.

Today, many Catholic educators, like much of society, are seeking spirituality outside traditional practices. While Mass, sacraments, the cycle of the liturgical year, communal feasts and celebration together with devotions have historically nourished the faith community, there is a growing need for more personalized spiritual experiences. Retreats, meditation, prayer groups, and pilgrimages are becoming popular ways for teachers to connect with their faith on a deeper level.

- **Recommendation:** Spirituality should be a key focus of Catholic school divisions, supported by resources and leadership from the Church. Local bishops, priests, retreat leaders, and spiritual directors can enhance and assist in these efforts, ensuring that the formation provided is both theologically sound and spiritually enriching. When Catholic educators are spiritually nourished, they are better equipped to share their faith with students and foster a community centred on Christ.
  - **Reflection:** Initiatives like retreats, small faith communities, mentorship, and service projects can create meaningful experiences that inspire and rejuvenate teachers. Pilgrimages offer profound opportunities for spiritual growth. Whether it's the historic pilgrimages in Quebec, the Camino de Santiago in Spain, World Youth Day, or local sites like Lac Ste. Anne, Skaro, and Our Lady of Lourdes (Paroisse Notre Dame de Lourdes) Assumption Pilgrimage in Girouxville in Alberta, these journeys can deepen faith and build community.

Ultimately, effective spiritual formation requires intentionality and commitment. Catholic educators need sustained and engaging opportunities for reflection, prayer, and service. By investing in their spiritual well-being, Catholic school divisions can help teachers flourish both personally and professionally,

enhancing their ability to witness and share the faith with their students and communities.

### **Embracing Our Mission: Strengthening Catholic Identity in Schools.**

The leadership of Catholic school divisions—trustees, senior administration, and staff—have a vital opportunity to regularly revisit and engage with their mission, goals, and policies. Through thoughtful internal and external audits of their Catholic identity, in light of the assurance model currently being used throughout the province and in line with new tools of assurance from the bishops, they can ensure alignment with the aims of Catholic education, celebrating the unique mission that guides their work.

- **Recommendation:** Catholic school divisions should prioritize policies and practices that consistently reflect their distinctive purpose. A clearly articulated mission statement, widely known and actively shared, serves as a cornerstone. By keeping the mission central to all decisions and discussions, schools can maintain a vibrant and authentic Catholic identity that enriches their educational and operational activities.
  - **Reflection:** Trustees and senior administrators play a crucial role in nurturing this identity. Their active engagement and formation in the principles of Catholic education empower them to lead with purpose and clarity. Regular reflection on the division’s mission helps keep it relevant and impactful, enabling leaders to guide their schools with a strong sense of direction.
- **Recommendation:** As Catholic schools navigate a complex societal landscape, it’s essential to resist influences that threaten their identity—such as individualism, competition, and consumerism.
  - **Reflection:** By ensuring that the Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school policy, including finance, human resources, and student treatment, schools can protect their distinctive character and mission.
- **Recommendation:** Conducting regular audits is key to maintaining a strong Catholic identity. Evaluations should involve individuals with a deep understanding of the theological and spiritual dimensions of education.
  - **Reflection:** Authentic assessments can provide valuable insights and recommendations, helping divisions align more closely with their mission.

Ongoing faith formation for Catholic leaders is essential for the flourishing of these schools. Collaboration among church leaders, university instructors, and school leaders will enrich the education and formation of trustees, senior

administrators, and staff. This shared effort equips all stakeholders to articulate what makes Catholic schools unique and vital to their communities.

In summary, prioritizing intentionality, ongoing formation, and authentic assurance will sustain and enhance the Catholic identity of school divisions. By embracing these principles, Catholic schools can continue to thrive as vibrant communities of faith and learning, making a meaningful impact on their educators and students alike.

### **Investing in Teacher Faith Formation: Balancing Mission Values with Financial Realities in Catholic Schools**

Catholic education thrives on a delicate balance between mission, values, and navigating a public, government-funded system. Teachers often find satisfaction and purpose in working at a well-integrated, faith-based school, where their commitment may ask them to prioritize spiritual growth over certain worldly pursuits. This is why investing in teacher faith formation is essential—not just for professional development, but for nurturing their holistic well-being and community life.

- **Recommendation:** It's crucial for Catholic school divisions to prioritize funding for ongoing faith formation as a core part of their budget. As Sr. Clare Fitzgerald noted (Mulligan, 2006, p. 252), "Show me your budget and I will tell you the board's priorities." This serves as a powerful reminder for Catholic schools to reflect on how much they truly value the faith formation of their teachers and staff. A strong faith formation program cultivates an environment where educators can flourish spiritually and professionally, enriching the entire school community.
  - **Reflection:** Neglecting this investment can have serious consequences. A Newfoundland teacher, reflecting on the loss of government-funded Catholic education in the province, noted, "The test of your belief in Catholic education comes when you are willing to invest money in formation. We failed that test" (Mulligan, 2006, p. 241). Alberta Catholic schools must not make the same mistake; funding for faith formation must be seen as central to their mission.
- **Recommendation:** To remain faithful to their mission, Catholic school divisions must resist the urge to operate like businesses focused solely on competition. Decisions should be guided by the mission, even if it means reallocating resources. Educational leaders must embrace their role as pastoral guides, rooted in the teachings of the Church.
  - **Reflection:** While funding faith formation may require sacrifices in other areas, Catholic schools can choose to focus on their authentic identity rather than competing for students based on market-driven metrics. By

prioritizing the holistic development of their staff, they can provide an education that stands apart from the consumerist values prevalent today.

Ultimately, a commitment to teacher faith formation reflects a school division's dedication to its mission. Investing in the spiritual and professional growth of teachers not only enhances their well-being but also strengthens the entire school community. Well-formed teachers become powerful witnesses and leaders, fostering a vibrant, faith-filled educational environment.

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