

Teachers as Missionary Disciples: *Forming witnesses for Catholic schools*

CATHOLIC EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM



Executive Summary

Dr. Dean Sarnecki



Disclaimer

This executive summary provides an overview of key discussions, insights, and recommendations from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA) Symposium held on February 9-10, 2024. The full report, available on the ACSTA website, offers a detailed analysis of teacher faith formation, participant feedback, and a strategic framework for strengthening Catholic education across Alberta, Yukon, and Northwest Territories. The perspectives shared reflect the views of symposium participants, with interpretations and recommendations made by the author. Participation and use of this framework are at the discretion of individual school boards.

Executive Summary:

Dr. Dean Sarnecki

Teachers as Missionary Disciples: *Forming Witnesses for Catholic Schools*

“Young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers.”

Pope Benedict XVI

Introduction

The ACSTA Symposium gathered 130 participants from Alberta, Yukon, and Northwest Territories to explore the critical role of faith formation in Catholic teacher development. With input from educators, clergy, and academics, the event sought to address many of the Catholicity challenges and opportunities related to teacher preparation and professional development. The resulting framework emphasizes the need for ongoing collaboration among Catholic educators, post-secondary institutions, and Church leaders to nurture both the spiritual and professional growth of Catholic teachers.



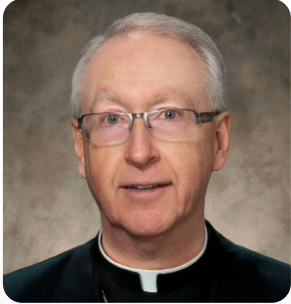


Living in the Word of God: A Template for Teacher Faith Formation

Drawing on Archbishop Richard Smith's pastoral letter *Living in the Word of God* (2017), this framework integrates worship, witness, and service as foundational elements of teacher formation. Teachers are called to embody God's mercy, regularly participate in the Sacraments, and serve as living witnesses of Christ's love. This holistic model nurtures educators spiritually, preparing them to model Catholic teachings and virtues in their classrooms and communities.

Keynote Speakers

Summary



Archbishop Richard Smith



Dr. Matt Hoven



Dr. Roisin Coll



Paul Corrigan



Ryan Ledene

The symposium featured expert speakers who offered valuable insights into the intersection of faith and pedagogy:

- **Archbishop Richard Smith** emphasized teachers' roles as witnesses to the Gospel.
- **Dr. Matt Hoven** highlighted the need for continuous integration of faith within teaching practices.
- **Dr. Roisin Coll** stressed the importance of a strong Catholic curriculum that integrates faith with reason.
- **Superintendents Paul Corrigan and Ryan Ledene** discussed challenges and opportunities for faith formation in publicly funded Catholic schools.

Their diverse perspectives contributed to the development of a comprehensive strategy for strengthening Catholic teacher formation in Alberta, Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Participant Insights

The symposium featured expert speakers who offered valuable insights into the intersection of faith and pedagogy:

1. **Formation Experiences:** Personal relationships, faith-based programs, and impactful events were crucial in shaping participants' faith journeys.
2. **Community and Parish Life:** Active participation in parish life was seen as essential for maintaining and growing in faith.
3. **Educational Approaches and Teacher Formation:** Teachers must balance intellectual instruction with spiritual formation, with strong support from educational institutions, parishes, and bishops.

The key message was that Catholic education is rooted in relationships, and a holistic approach to teacher faith formation is vital to nurturing a resilient Catholic community.



Key Recommendations for Teacher Faith Formation

Participants repeatedly called for Catholic education leaders to:

1. **Prioritize Spiritual Formation:** School divisions should treat ongoing faith formation as a strategic priority, offering retreats, courses, and professional development to support teachers' spiritual well-being.
2. **Holistic Educator Formation:** Teacher formation should address contemporary issues, such as social justice, while deepening educators' relationship with Christ.
3. **Strengthen Catholic Identity:** Trustees and school leadership must actively support and reflect Catholic identity in policies, practices, and regular audits.
4. **Financial Investment in Faith Formation:** Faith formation should be a core budget item, reflecting its importance to Catholic education.

Provincial Initiatives for Strengthening Catholic Education

Catholic education organizations can achieve great things by working collaboratively. ACSTA, its Catholic Education Partners and the Bishops of Alberta, Yukon and Northwest Territories should prioritize:

1. **Unified Vision:** Foster collaboration across Alberta, Yukon, and Northwest Territories to present a united front for Catholic education.
2. **Research and Resources:** Establish a provincial research institute and a centralized database for best practices in Catholic education.
3. **Teacher Recruitment and Retention:** Develop initiatives to recruit and retain Catholic teachers, especially in rural areas.
4. **Partnerships with Universities:** Support universities in offering Catholic education courses and expand access to faith-based teacher training.



Key Actions

- **Leadership:** Ensure strong leadership from bishops, trustees, and superintendents, with a commitment to financially support teacher faith formation.
- **Formation Programs:** Establish province-wide faith formation programs with incentives for teachers.
- **Common Curriculum:** Create a unified curriculum for faith formation across divisions.
- **Symposiums and Resource Sharing:** Organize regular events and share resources to integrate Catholic values across all subjects.

” “Those who have leadership positions are duty-bound to guarantee that all personnel receive adequate preparation to serve effectively”

Congregation for Catholic Education

For School Divisions: Enhancing Catholic Education

Effective faith formation occurs at the school level where teachers and administration together grow in faith with students. This can be enhanced through:

1. **Hiring & Professional Development:** Establish comprehensive onboarding programs, prioritize hiring teachers who are well-formed in the Catholic faith, and integrate faith formation into ongoing professional development.
2. **Faith Formation & Vision:** Develop and communicate a clear vision for teacher faith formation, create personalized faith development plans, and require staff participation in growth opportunities.
3. **Accountability & Mentorship:** Implement accountability measures for teachers' faith practices and provide mentorship programs, including spiritual direction for new and experienced educators.
4. **Community & Parish Involvement:** Strengthen connections between staff, local parishes, and the broader faith community to support teachers' spiritual growth.
5. **Faith Integration in Education:** Ensure faith is integrated across all subjects. Inspire students through visible expressions of the Catholic faith. Emphasize the vocational nature of teaching in a Catholic school.



For Local Schools: Where Faith Meets Pedagogy Daily

1. **Culture of Prayer:** Integrate prayer into the daily life of the school to shape collective spirituality.
2. **Teacher as Witness:** Teachers must model strong faith and moral character, serving as role models for students.
3. **Teacher Mentorship:** Provide mentorship and spiritual support through regular participation in Mass and other faith-building activities.
4. **Pastoral Leadership:** School leaders should adopt a pastoral approach, balancing academic and spiritual formation.
5. **Role of Chaplains:** Prioritize the role of chaplains to support both staff and students in living out their faith.





Role of School Trustees

Trustees are essential in supporting teacher faith formation by championing resources, guiding the strategic vision for faith-centered education, and upholding accountability. Their leadership fosters a culture of spiritual growth that enriches both educators and students alike.



Future Directions

To advance teacher faith formation, the following actions are recommended:

1. Develop self-reflection tools for schools to assess their faith formation practices.
2. Establish a research center focused on Catholic education in Western Canada.
3. Pilot projects to study effective faith formation practices.
4. Organize biannual gatherings to review progress and adapt strategies.





Dr. Dean Sarnecki

Additional Considerations: Insights from the Author

Collaboration with Theological Institutions: Partnering with theological institutions is crucial for developing relevant and effective faith formation programs. These collaborations can provide valuable resources and research, ensuring that teacher formation remains grounded in solid Catholic principles.

Mentorship Programs: Establishing mentorship initiatives can help connect experienced educators with new teachers, fostering a supportive community and strengthening the spiritual foundation of the teaching staff.

Engagement with Families and Communities: Involving families and the wider community in faith formation efforts enhances support networks for both students and educators, creating a more holistic approach to spiritual development.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges: Faith formation programs should include discussions on contemporary issues, such as mental health and social polarization. Educators should be equipped with the tools to navigate these challenges from a Catholic perspective, helping them address the complex needs of today's students.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing clear metrics to assess the effectiveness of faith formation initiatives will ensure that programs meet the needs of educators, contributing to both their spiritual and professional growth.

Inclusive Approaches: Faith formation programs must be adaptable to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of educators, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the teaching community.

Celebrating Successes: Sharing success stories from teachers who have benefited from faith formation programs can inspire others and demonstrate the positive impact of spiritual development on the wider educational community.

Conclusion

Excellent teacher faith formation is essential for the continued success of publicly funded Catholic education in Alberta, Yukon, and Northwest Territories. By investing in the spiritual and professional growth of educators, Catholic schools can nurture a vibrant, faith-filled environment that prepares students to live out the Gospel in their lives. This commitment to teacher formation will contribute to a transformative Catholic educational experience that is rooted in faith, hope, and love.

“ The influence of educators, especially on young people, depends more on who they are as persons and on how they live than on what they say. . . . [Teachers] can therefore be an effective formator of young people. Every good formator must receive a solid formation. It is necessary to form formators.”

Pope Francis

This executive summary offers a high-level overview of the key discussions and recommendations made during the ACSTA Symposium, with the aim of strengthening teacher faith formation in Catholic schools across the region. The full report offers a more comprehensive framework for implementing these initiatives and guiding the future of Catholic education.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our Facilitators:

Event Facilitator: Michael Hauptman

Table Facilitators/Data Recorders

Organizing Committee

Dean Sarnecki, Elk Island CSSD (Chair)

Kelly Whalen, ACSTA President

Kathleen Nguyen, Edmonton CSSD

Linda Ellefson, Holy Spirit RCSSD

Kathy Glasgo, Medicine Hat CSRD

Clare Ganton, St. Thomas Aquinas RCSSD

Stacey MacNeil-Ayeh, CCSSA

Michael Hauptman, Consultant

Reviewers

Dr. Matt Hoven, St. Joseph's College - University of Alberta

Dr. Eugenia Pagnotta-Kowalczyk, St. Joseph's College - University of Alberta

ACSTA Staff

