



Catholic Education Symposium 2017:

Exploring the Critical Role of Catholic Education
In Contemporary Society

Directors of Education, Ontario Catholic School Boards
Chairs, Ontario Catholic School Boards

Dear Colleagues

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE), I am pleased to invite you to attend the upcoming province-wide symposium on Catholic Education. Focusing on the theme ***“Renewing the Promise: Exploring the Critical Role of Catholic Education in Contemporary Society”***, the symposium will be held in partnership with the French Catholic education community in Toronto on November 14 and 15, 2017.

Following the Province’s decision to extend full funding in support of Catholic schools, and their commitment to publically fund four school systems (French and English, Public and Catholic) the Bishops of Ontario recognized the need to gather the Catholic education community in conversation to understand both the challenges and opportunities that were present at that time. The Bishops also established the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) and Office provincial de ‘education de la foi catholique en Ontario (OPECO) with a mandate to animate and encourage cooperation between the Catholic educational partners. From time to time, at the request of the Bishops, and with the encouragement and support of the partners, ICE and OPECO have arranged provincial symposia bringing together representatives from every sector of the Catholic education community to explore contemporary issues in Catholic education. The last provincial symposium was held in 2011.

For an earlier generation of Catholic educators, documents developed by the Bishops of Ontario, ***“This Moment of Promise”*** and ***“Fulfilling the Promise”*** established a clear and compelling mission and vision for Catholic schools. Today, our mission and vision for Catholic education have not changed, but our context has changed profoundly. At this time it is important that we come together in conversation, gathering as a community to name and understand the challenges presented by an increasingly complex and secular society today, and to identify and build consensus around the opportunities that will shape our future. This symposium, exploring the theme, ***“Renewing the Promise”***, will help us better understand the ways in which Catholic schools serve and support the mission of the church, while bringing the gifts of justice, peace and joy to our students and our province alike.

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To ensure the success of this symposium, your assistance and support is requested.

- 1) **Designate one person at your Board to communicate with the ICE office.** This person will be responsible for the registration of your board's local team, circulation of symposium materials and communications, and will be the point of contact between ICE and your Board. Please advise ICE by email renewingthepromise@iceont.ca of your Board's contact person **by March 10, 2017.**
- 2) **Begin to assemble your local Board team,** in collaboration with the diocese and your local education partners. Guidelines for team composition are included within this information package (pg. 7).
- 3) **Undertake the local process of consultation and engagement** outlined within this information package (pg. 7-11). This important step, in preparation for the symposium, will ensure that the voice and the experiences of your community are reflected as part of this provincial conversation. The local engagement process, involving both face to face meetings, and opportunities for on-line participation, can commence at your earliest opportunity, to be completed **by May 19, 2017.**

On behalf of the ICE Board of Directors, I thank you for your willingness to support this important conversation, the necessary preparation, and your subsequent participation on November 14 and 15, 2017.

Sincerely,



Michael W. Pautler
Executive Director
Institute for Catholic Education

cc Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
 Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario
 Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education
 Ontario Catholic School Business Officials' Association
 Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
 Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association
 Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

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Background Information

Established by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario in 1987, the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) and Office provincial de l'éducation de la foi catholique en Ontario (OPECO) play an important role in animating and orchestrating the necessary cooperation between the Catholic educational partners, and provide support to 37 Catholic school boards (29 English, 8 French), to enhance the Catholicity of the system. Together, the two organizations work to 'promote and maintain publicly-funded Catholic schools animated by the Gospel and reflecting the tenets of the Catholic faith.'

One of the core objectives for ICE and OPECO established by the partners is a mandate "to arrange periodic gatherings of representatives from every sector of the Catholic education community for the purpose of exploring together contemporary issues in Catholic education." The last ICE/OPECO symposium was held in May 2011.

Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario

From time to time, the Bishops of Ontario, speaking through the collective voice of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, offer pastoral letters to provide encouragement, support and advice for those who work in the service of Catholic education. In 1988, the Bishops authored ***This Moment of Promise***, describing the cultural and societal conditions that characterized that era, highlighting the provincial legislation that completed funding for the Catholic separate school system, and anticipating the implications that might follow that historical decision. The letter encouraged all involved in Catholic education to respond proactively to the promises and challenges of the legislation and choose directions that would preserve and promote Catholic education as well as contribute to the life of the province and Canada as a whole. The letter states:

We have staked our hope as a nation on the possibility of strengthening our common social fabric by safeguarding the distinctive voice of each thread within it. Our ongoing commitment to the development of Catholic education represents one such contribution to the common fabric. By reinforcing this distinctive thread of what is best in our Church community, we want to enhance the unique qualities of other communities and the ties, which bind us all together. Our commitment to cultivating the special characteristics of Catholic education, and thus enhancing the fabric of society, impels us to address first our brothers and sisters of the Catholic community and, then, our fellow citizens of Ontario.

In the 1990's the Bishops again issued a pastoral letter, ***Fulfilling the Promise***, which offered further encouragement, and specifically focused on the critical role of leadership in supporting and sustaining the Catholicity of the school system.

In the intervening 25 years Ontario's Catholic schools have continued to thrive, and publicly funded Catholic school systems, both French and English, have flourished and expanded. Over the span of time, the population of Ontario has grown significantly, both in terms of numbers, but also in terms of diversity. Contemporary Ontario society honours diversity, celebrates multiculturalism, champions human rights, and provides protections for freedom of religious expression. This contemporary, complex and increasingly secular society is the context for the work of Catholic schools today, and offers both challenges and opportunities.

Symposium 2017 – Renewing the Promise: Exploring the Critical Role of Catholic Education in Contemporary Society

The Catholic education community will gather for a two-day symposium on November 14 and 15, 2017, at the International Plaza Hotel & Conference Center, Toronto Airport, 655 Dixon Road, Toronto, ON. M9W 1J3. Detailed registration information will be available in March, 2017.

The theme of the symposium is, ***Renewing the Promise: Exploring the Critical Role of Catholic Education in Contemporary Society***. The symposium will be a joint venture, organized by ICE and OPECO, and the program will be offered in both official languages.

The two-day provincial symposium will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 14, 2017 with opening prayer, and it is anticipated that 700 representatives of the French and English Catholic Education community will be in attendance. We will gather to engage in prayer, discernment, and dialogue as we explore the challenges and opportunities for Catholic education within the context of our historical time. The first full day of discussion and exploration will conclude with a banquet on Tuesday evening at 6:30 p.m., where we will recognize, celebrate and honour religious communities for their historical contribution to Catholic Education. On Wednesday November 15, 2017 we will continue with dialogue, a plenary session, and the day will culminate with a celebration of the Eucharist with our Celebrant, Thomas Cardinal Collins. A commissioning and final blessing will conclude the symposium by 12:00 noon. (A tentative schedule for the two-day event is included in Appendix A).

Participants

The Symposium will bring together representatives of the key stakeholder groups who together share the responsibility for Catholic education. The richness of the conversation grows from the broad representation from across the province. **We encourage Boards to embrace this opportunity to participate in this important dialogue. We rely upon you to facilitate the process by assembling and supporting the participation of a Board team. In the spirit of collaboration, Directors are encouraged to consult with local OECTA and CPCO representatives in order to ensure coordination, and to avoid overlapping.**

Board Teams

Suggested Local Board Team Composition (14):

1. Chair of the Board
2. Director of Education
3. Elementary School Council Parents (2)
4. Secondary School Council Parents (2)
5. System Chaplaincy Leader/Faith Animator
6. Diocesan Representative (to be determined in consultation with Local Bishop)
7. Elementary Teacher
8. Secondary Teacher
9. Elementary Principal
10. Secondary Principal
11. Senior Secondary Students (2)

Additional Participants

Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) – All Ontario Catholic Bishops are invited to attend. In some cases, your local bishop may be considered as part of a Board team. In other instances, the bishop will appoint a diocesan representative to each of the School Board teams within the diocese, and choose to attend independently.

ICE Partners – In addition to the local Board teams, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees (OCSTA), Teachers (OECTA), Principals (CPCO), Supervisory Officers – Academic and Business (OCSOA/OCSBOA), and Parents (OAPCE), are invited to arrange teams of up to six (6) members of their executive members. Chaplains, CRECO, Curriculum Cooperatives, Catholic Women’s League, Knights of Columbus, representatives of Catholic universities, Catholic representatives from Ontario faculties of education will be invited to attend, as space permits.

Registration Process

Please designate one person at your Board (e.g. your executive assistant) to communicate with the ICE office in terms of registrants. This person will be responsible for the registration of your Board’s local team, circulation of conference materials, etc. Kindly advise ICE via email renewingthepromise@iceont.ca **no later than March 10, 2017** of the name of your contact person.

Further information regarding registration for conference participants will be distributed by March 21, 2017. Registration will also open at that time.

Registration fee is \$365.00 per participant. In most instances, costs will be the responsibility of respective School Boards. The richness of the conversation is enhanced with broad representation from across the province, and we rely on School Boards to facilitate the process and to support the endeavour financially through the registration costs for symposium participants. We recognize that the costs associated with registration, and in addition travel and accommodation, are significant for School Boards, however we believe that it is critical to bring the Catholic education community together from time to time for these important conversations. Active participation and support of School Boards to ensure the voices of your community are included in this provincial conversation is pivotal for the outcome of the symposium. School Boards may make local decisions to adjust the size of their local team to make participation possible.

Partner organizations and associations are similarly responsible for registration, travel and accommodation costs for their team members. The ACBO will cover registration costs for Bishops attending the Symposium. Local dioceses are responsible for travel and accommodation costs for Bishops.

Consultation and Engagement

The symposium will provide opportunities for honest dialogue and discussion. We will identify the ways in which Catholic education contributes to the province of Ontario and to the common good, build a shared understanding of our collective challenges, and collaboratively and creatively explore the opportunities that allow us to bring the truth and wisdom of our faith tradition into the context of this particular time and place. Within the faith tradition of the Catholic church, our holistic view of the human person, and our understanding of what

constitutes the ‘common good’, may sometimes be at variance with some of the assumptions and perspectives held by contemporary culture in a secular society. Catholic schools have the opportunity to introduce the wisdom of our faith tradition into this ongoing and dynamic societal conversation. In every age, Catholics are challenged to be a leaven in society as a service to others and we are needed as a full partner in the human quest for greater justice and truer community.

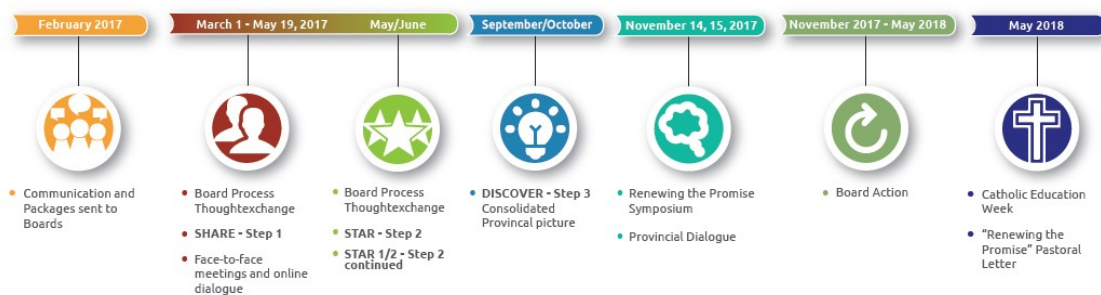
Through the independent facilitation of *Thoughtexchange*, a third-party software solution, ICE and OPECO will meaningfully engage all the partners in Catholic education and within the School Board communities using an open process. This process will provide information to guide the provincial conversation at the Symposium, support the work of the partners, provide context and inform the initiative of the Bishops. The effective engagement provided by the *Thoughtexchange* process will provide important input into the planning for the symposium and help build consensus around emerging directions, opportunities and initiatives.

While the symposium will bring together more than 700 participants from across the province, the local engagement process in advance of the symposium is an opportunity to expand the conversation and bring many more voices and perspectives into the room to inform and enrich the dialogue.

A monthly *Renewing the Promise Update Newsletter* will be forwarded to Boards throughout the process of engagement, both pre - and post - Symposium.

Timeline for Engagement

March to May 2017: School Boards are asked to facilitate a local process of consultation and engagement in preparation for the symposium.



Pre-Symposium Engagement March – May 2017

Boards are asked to conduct a 45-60 minute face-to-face engagement session with a number of groups. This session would typically be included as part of previously scheduled meetings sometime between March 1, 2017 and May 19, 2017.