

Beauty of

Life

Awaken the Senses, Stir the Heart



We are called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. - 1 Peter 2:9

Excerpts from School Opening, August 2010\*\*\*by Joan Carr, Superintendent

# A Very Warm Welcome

to each of you as we begin a new year - our 122<sup>st</sup> year  
of Catholic education in Edmonton Catholic Schools.

- A new year is a new beginning - a new adventure - a new journey. It will bring epiphanies - those sudden realizations or intuitive leaps of understanding realized through the ordinary but striking occurrences we encounter. In fact, we can comfortably say that our entire year ahead will be a continuous epiphany.
- Our theme for the year is "The Beauty of Life...Awaken the Senses, Stir the Heart." To embrace this call, we need our eyes, ears, hands, mouths and especially our hearts to appreciate and live the moments of wonder around us and to hear the wisdom coming our way.
- Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily at the Mass to inaugurate his Papacy, told us: *"There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him."*
- We are blessed in our work each day with students, colleagues, parents and communities where we are able to express our relationship with Jesus - be the models of his Gospel teachings. Our work is to be treasured in all of its magnificence.
- One of our symbols this year is the nautilus shell representing humanity, nature and the spirit. It mimics the eardrum and follows the waves of the water, symbolizing our connection with God.
- May it represent for you some teachings of the sea - the waves echo faith, patience, simplicity - all part of what we are and what we strive for - the beauty of our own life in communion with each other and our own God.
- 'Everything Belongs' is a small book written by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan theologian and author. Focused on fostering a prayer life, its challenge is simple but profound: "Be aware of God in all things." He speaks to the idea that nothing is more beautiful than our life in communion with one another sharing in the life of Christ. "One God, one world, one truth, one suffering and one love. All we can do is participate."

- We need this reality to awaken our senses and stir our hearts. We need to continually reverence the presence of God in all that we do and in all that we share together.
- The heart and soul of our mission is to enter and engage this way of life. We need to continually journey with Jesus - awaken our senses and stir our hearts.
- Richard Rohr goes on to say that we need to move from worshipping Jesus' journey to actually 'doing His journey.' This speaks to the very heart of why we exist as Catholic schools.
- Our schools are to be ventures of living in this way - awakening awareness and stirring young hearts to truly see the beauty of our life in Christ.
- We need to see clearly that Catholic schools are more than learning but a venture in doing Jesus' journey. That is the beauty of life we share with Jesus Christ.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

- We are moving into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- We must move beyond the articulation of our vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning to the outcomes of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.
- We must be cognizant of the changing needs of our students and flexible in the delivery of the learning process.
- There are so many aspects of learning that are intertwined. The areas of curriculum need to focus on global awareness, health and environmental literacy, learning and innovation skills, information, media and technology skills all within the support systems of assessment, professional development and learning environments.
- The digital world is reshaping how the terms learner, teacher and school are defined. It is hard to imagine that our students who are entering kindergarten this fall will be graduating in 2023 and could well be living into the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. How do we best prepare them for this life?
- The time is right for reimagineering Catholic education through welcome, witness and wonder.

# Call to Mission, Vision and 21st Century Learning

Let us now turn to our District foundation statement – and specifically focus on our mission in Edmonton Catholic Schools.

- Our District is called to fulfill its mandate of Catholic education. This is our mission and, in the uniqueness of our own time and place, it finds expression in our mission statement. It clearly states our identity and purpose. While it is not a complicated statement, it is one of great significance and is the guiding force in everything we do.
- As we begin this new school year, once again, let us affirm our mission.
- The mission of Edmonton Catholic Schools is to provide a Catholic education that inspires students to learn and that prepares them to live fully and to serve God in one another.
- Our vision is that “our students will learn together, work together and pray together in answering the call to a faith-filled life of service.”
- This is what we are about...everything we do needs to reflect these statements.
- Our 21<sup>st</sup> century learning statement says we are preparing our students for a world not yet realized. “In support of hopeful Christ-centred living, in a society transformed by globalization, technological innovation and human ingenuity, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning complements our commitment as a Catholic community of learners, leaders and educators... Guided by our moral compass and focused on the common good, students and staff will be self-directed, adaptable, discerning and curious, as they engage individually and collaboratively in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.”
- Our responsibility is to make these statements come alive in the areas of our work always within the context of our eight characters of Catholic education and core values. I invite you to give thought to how these statements are expressed in everything you do and in your leadership journeys.



# Goals and Priorities for 2010-2011

- Responding to the challenge of the mission to which we are called, the District has established a district plan for continuous growth - our goals and priorities for 2010-2011. Here are the goals briefly stated:
- **Goal One:** *Celebrate and Promote Catholic Education* - in all that we do, we promote the uniqueness of Catholic education as lived in Jesus Christ present in life, curriculum and culture of our schools. This goal is central to our purpose and is our primary reason for existence.
- **Goal Two:** *Provide High Levels of Student Learning* - we strive for excellence in pedagogy and programs, permeated by the beliefs and values of our faith, resulting in the highest possible levels of student achievement. We engage students in transformative learning which develops deep and innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Goal Three:** *Success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students* -The FNMI population presents unique challenges to school districts; additional supports and strategies are needed to address the challenges.
- **Goal Four:** *Be a Highly Responsive and Responsible Catholic School District* - recognizing that community lies at the heart of our identity, we seek to strengthen its presence through social justice, extending hospitality to all and entering into partnerships with others. We need to be efficient and effective in meeting the needs of our students: 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are responsive. In moving to a conceptual age, we need to have students seeking information and developing concepts and solutions.



Within the framework of our mission and plan for the year, I would like to share my goals for 2010-2011. These goals have been prepared collaboratively with the Board of Trustees:

**Goal One** - *Celebrate and Promote Catholic Education:*

- 1.1 Plan for “Reimagining our Catholic Schools through Welcome, Witness and Wonder” - November conference.
- 1.2 Implement the “New Directions for Religious Education in Edmonton Catholic Schools.”

**Goal Two** - *Provide High Levels of Student Learning:*

- 2.1 Continue to implement strategies for high school completion (focus on Aboriginal students, ESL students, at risk students, implementation of the high school completion centre, graduation coach model, etc.).
- 2.2 Develop instructional leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner by beginning a 10 year plan for staff professional development.
- 2.3 Continue the development of dimensions of Catholic leadership in the District within the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner.
- 2.4 Focus on improving number of students achieving the standard of excellence in math and science diploma exams.

**Goal Three** - *Success for FNMI Students:*

- 3.1 Continue to implement strategies for high school completion for our FNMI students.
- 3.2 Focus on strategies for the recruitment of FNMI teachers.

**Goal Four** - *Be a Highly Responsive and Responsible Catholic School District:*

- 4.1 Continue to foster relationships/partnerships with external organizations and institutions.
- 4.2 Continue to focus on health, wellness, and safety for students and staff.
- 4.3 Prepare for further financial challenges in preparation of the 2011-2012 budget.
- 4.4 Focus on selection for senior administrative leadership positions for next year.

## *Catholic Leadership*

- Jerry Goebel who will once again be joining us for Faith Development Day this coming February states that the ultimate goal of faith-based education is “sending young people as enthusiastic disciples of Christ to the most multi-cultural yet interconnected culture in history.”

- Leadership in today's world has shifted from a model of vertical leadership to becoming horizontal. Leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be highly adept in their specialties but also generalists at the same time. We need to be at the forefront of encouraging the creation of a different future for education.
- One of the most powerful books I read this summer is "Five Seconds at a Time: How Leaders Can Make the impossible Possible." Denis Shackel shares his experience in a tragic mountain climbing accident and how this experience made him realize that leadership is not a position but a disposition.
- We can apply the five seconds at a time technique to address any situation. We need to breathe and pause to reflect; then prioritize - know what the big rocks are; break down priorities into manageable pieces - can be called stones; and then to acknowledge the accomplishment or sometimes begin the process again.
- Leadership is a very demanding balancing act. We need to remember that we are human 'beings' not human 'doings.' We need to remember to keep the main thing 'the main thing.'
- Authentic leadership involves continually working through leadership principles and genuinely walking the talk. Every single step is important.
- Kouzes and Posner, who have spent over 30 years doing research on leadership, identify '10 truths about leadership' in their brand new book by the same name.
- The first truth is "focusing on the future sets leaders apart." The "capacity to imagining and articulate exciting future possibilities is a defining competence of leaders. You have to take the long term perspective. Gain insight from reviewing your past and develop oversight by looking around."
- Another truth they identify is that "leadership is an affair of the heart." "Leaders are in love with what they do and the mission they are serving."
- We need to believe in a positive future. In summary love is the soul of leadership; love and passion is what sustains people along a challenging journey; and love is the source of a leader's courage.
- Parker Palmer, a highly respected author, lecturer, activist and teacher, writes that "the power of authentic leadership is found not externally but in the human heart. Nothing important ever gets done without heart."
- Our hearts tell us that we genuinely care for people and we lead by being human.

# The Call of the Nautilus

- Choose one or many of these thoughts and have them become your daily mantra.
- Go with a humble heart, go to learn and to serve and share what you have received. (*Mother Teresa*)
- “Joy,” Mother Teresa said, “shows from the eyes. It appears when one speaks and walks. When people find in your eyes habitual happiness, they will understand that they are the beloved children of God.”
- To measure a leader, put a tape around the person’s heart not the person’s head. (*John C. Maxwell*)
- Leaders are pioneers. They are people who venture into unexplored territory. They are foot soldiers in the campaigns for change. (*James Kouzes and Barry Posner*)



## Conclusion

Each of you graces our District with your talents, strengths and gifts...we are so blessed to have each of you sharing those gifts with students, colleagues and parents – know that each of you has been blessed with at least one thing that you can do better than anyone else in the world.

*May your year be filled with much joy and many blessings.*

God’s calling is like a blackberry buzzing 24/7.

The work of magnificence is our human vocation. As our theme says:

**The Beauty of Life...Awaken the Senses, Stir the Heart**

We have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light...

let this year be a magnificent one!

“Be my eyes and see the world as I do.  
Be my hands and bring the world my healing.  
Be my heart and love the world with my heart.”

*(Excerpt taken from a song by the Sisters of St. Joseph – “Be My Eyes”)*

