

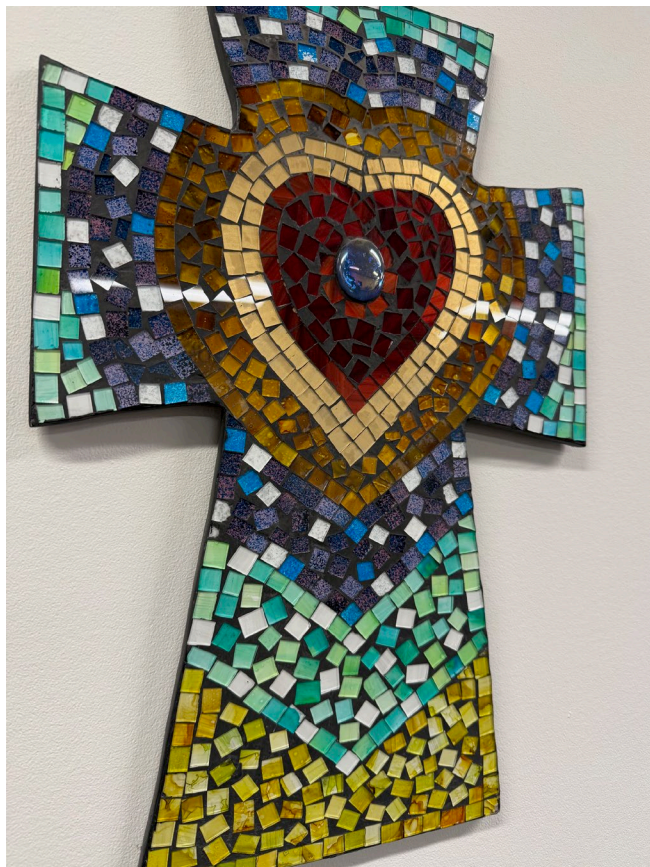
HOPE

People of



**MOVING TO THE BISHOPS' ASSURANCE MODEL
IN OUR SCHOOLS REPORT**

A Journey of Learning and Growing



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MAY 26, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Catholic education is rooted in a dynamic and living tradition that calls educators, students, and communities into transformation. The movement from the foundational *Five Marks*

of Catholic Identity toward the developing framework of *Bishops' Assurance* represents not a departure, but a deepening of this mission. It reflects a shift from showing what makes a school Catholic to actively living, measuring, and renewing that identity in intentional and accountable ways.

This report explores how Edmonton Catholic Schools continues its journey of faith and growth through two key areas: progress toward the *Bishops' Assurance* and support for the school-parish-home connection. Together, these two areas reveal a system striving for faithful, reflective, and Spirit-led transformation.

A. PROGRESS TOWARDS BISHOPS' ASSURANCE

To strengthen its mission and purpose, Edmonton Catholic Schools has concentrated its work primarily on the *Five Marks of Catholic School Identity* and the Faith Formation Plan. This year, the division will include another significant element: implementing the *Bishops' Assurance* model. As we shift to this provincial assurance model, the division will turn its attention to this new framework. For us, the transition to *Bishops' Assurance* marks a significant moment in the evolution of Catholic education within the division. Rooted in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Edmonton, this framework emphasizes transparency, accountability, and continuous faith development.



❖ Historical Context

In 2014, Catholic education leaders from across Alberta and the Northwest Territories gathered for *Growing Forward: Catholic Education Symposium on Catholic Education*, a landmark event that brought together more than 200 delegates, including representatives from Catholic school boards, senior administrators, trustees, superintendents, chaplains, bishops, priests, and other faith leaders. The symposium created a dedicated space for collective discernment amid growing complexity in publicly funded Catholic education.

The gathering was anchored by a keynote address from Archbishop Michael Miller, CSB, then Secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education. Drawing on his book *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools* (2006), he invited participants to reflect on the distinctive mission of Catholic schools in contemporary society, emphasizing the importance of remaining firmly rooted in Church teaching while responding thoughtfully to modern educational realities.

At the heart of the symposium was the guiding question: *What is an Authentic Catholic School Today?* Through keynote presentations, facilitated table discussions, and plenary dialogue, delegates engaged in prayerful reflection and substantive conversation on Catholic identity, given the practical challenges faced in an increasingly pluralistic and rapidly changing context.

Insights and reflections from the symposium were synthesized into a comprehensive report articulating a shared understanding of Catholic identity in education. This work led to the identification of the *Five Marks of an Authentic Catholic School*, key characteristics that define faith-filled learning environments, and to the establishment of a common language and framework for Catholic school divisions across the province.

In alignment with the work of the symposium, the *Five Marks of Catholic School Identity* are embedded within the Division's Foundation Statements, as shown in Board Policy 1. This framework provides a shared expectation across all schools for how Catholic faith is intentionally lived, expressed, and lived each day by students and staff. In the Division Plan for Continuous Growth 2023-2026, under the priority of *Living our Faith*, Goal F2 outlines: *ECSD Schools and departments will clearly demonstrate their Catholic identity as presented in the Five Marks of Catholic School Identity model.*

When the Division first embraced this framework in 2015, a three-year implementation plan was introduced to adopt the Five Marks framework across schools; a plan that was well-received and appreciated by schools. As is our standard practice, after three years of intentional work in the Five Marks, the division considered the framework part of its culture, and the implementation plan was retired. Our schools continue to affirm the Five Marks.

Drawing on anecdotal feedback and a range of survey results, Administration, over the past year, has engaged in purposeful discernment to name the evolving needs of the division and discuss how best to support its schools and departments. This work builds on Edmonton Catholic Schools long-standing role as a provincial leader in articulating and living Catholic school identity, particularly in its early and ongoing engagement with the *Five Marks of an Authentic Catholic School*.



Given her exceptional faith leadership, Chief Superintendent Anderson intentionally reinstated a focus on the Five Marks as a shared framework for strengthening Catholic identity across the Division. This renewed emphasis supported coherence, clarity, and collective responsibility for nurturing faith-filled learning environments. Further, a cross-departmental committee was introduced to find practical, accessible ways to advance each Mark, and through collaborative dialogue, the group developed a one-year plan that offered concrete, attainable strategies to strengthen Catholic identity in daily practice.

In addition to the *Five Marks of Catholic School Identity*, the symposium also informed the development of the *Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool (CSIAT)*, a formative resource designed to support reflection and growth. Rather than serving as a compliance mechanism, the CSIAT encourages dialogue and continuous improvement by helping school divisions and leaders assess how effectively the Five Marks are reflected in their policies, practices, relationships, and learning environments.

Today, the 2014 Provincial Symposium remains a foundational moment in Alberta's Catholic education landscape. Its legacy continues to shape ongoing conversations about Catholic identity, mission integrity, and the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in fostering authentic Catholic schools.

Renewing Partnership and Shared Responsibility

Building on the foundation introduced by the 2014 Provincial Symposium, and the subsequent development of the *Five Marks and the Catholic School Identity Assessment Tool (CSIAT)*, Catholic education leaders recognized the need to renew and strengthen relationships across the provincial landscape. In May 2023, a series of roundtable meetings was convened, bringing together the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA), the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA), GrACE (Grateful Advocates for Catholic Education), and other key partners.

These gatherings appeared from a shared recognition that, while each organization remained deeply committed to Catholic education, there was a need to strengthen relationship-building, improve communication pathways, and clarify roles and responsibilities among partners. Participants acknowledged that evolving educational, legal, cultural, and societal pressures called for a more intentional and coordinated approach to leadership within publicly funded Catholic education.

The roundtable format fostered a respectful and candid environment for dialogue, attentive listening, and mutual reflection. Conversations focused on understanding each partner's distinct mission, authority, and sphere of influence, while finding areas of overlap where collaboration could be enhanced. Particular attention was given to the relationship between the bishops' pastoral leadership and the governance and operational responsibilities of trustees, superintendents, and school divisions, alongside the advocacy role of organizations such as GrACE.



A consistent theme throughout the discussions was the importance of presenting a unified and coherent voice in support of Catholic education across Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Participants recognized that effective public witness, advocacy, and faith leadership are strengthened when grounded in trust, shared language, and a mutual understanding of Catholic identity and mission.

The May 2023 roundtable meetings reaffirmed that Catholic education is a shared ministry of the Church, one that depends on collaboration rather than parallel efforts. By strengthening communication, clarifying expectations, and deepening mutual respect, partners are committed to working more intentionally together and to supporting one another in leadership, faith formation, and responses to emerging challenges. These conversations marked a meaningful step toward renewed unity and collaboration in the service of students, families, and the broader Catholic community.

❖ Ongoing Dialogue and Relationship Building

A solid foundation is clear, given the ongoing dialogue with Archdiocesan representatives. Invitations extended to their team members to attend Opening School Mass, Faith Development Day, weekly liturgies at Lumen Christi Catholic Education Centre, Religious Education gatherings, and Board Meetings have created meaningful opportunities for engagement. These encounters have fostered a spirit of openness and mutual trust, strengthening the relationship between the school division and the Church.

❖ Research and Initial Planning

Significant groundwork has also been completed at the leadership level. Research into the practices of four pilot school divisions has offered valuable insights into how *Bishops' Assurance* can be implemented effectively. This learning process has been complemented by direct consultation with the Bishop's Liaison, which has helped to clarify expectations and align divisional efforts with episcopal priorities. A key milestone was the collaborative meeting scheduled in April, where principals, Religious Education Services, Leadership Services, and system administration came together to begin shaping a pilot model for implementation within the division. The inclusion of diverse voices ensures that the process is still grounded in the lived realities of schools.



❖ A Framework for Implementation

At its core, *Bishops' Assurance* invites the Division into a continuous cycle of reflection and renewal:

- **Reflect** – Assess the current reality of Catholic identity within schools
- **Discern** – Identify areas for spiritual and communal growth
- **Act** – Implement purposeful and meaningful changes
- **Witness** – Live out faith authentically and visibly
- **Renew** – Sustain growth through ongoing reflection and action

This cycle emphasizes that Catholic identity is not a static checklist but a lived experience that evolves over time. The impact of this approach is both systemic and local. At the divisional level, it fosters coherence and shared direction. At the school level, it empowers communities to take ownership of their faith journey.

❖ Looking Ahead

Over the next three months, the Division can expect:

- Development of a pilot model for *Bishops' Assurance*
- Continued collaboration with Archdiocesan leadership
- Increased clarity around expectations and implementation processes
- Opportunities for schools to engage in reflective practice

The movement toward *Bishops' Assurance* represents a shift in mindset moving from a traditional accountability model of reporting to an assurance model where the focus is on building confidence among those within and beyond our Edmonton Catholic community and showing how the Division is actively living, strengthening, and growing its Catholic identity in cooperation and conversation with the Archdiocese.



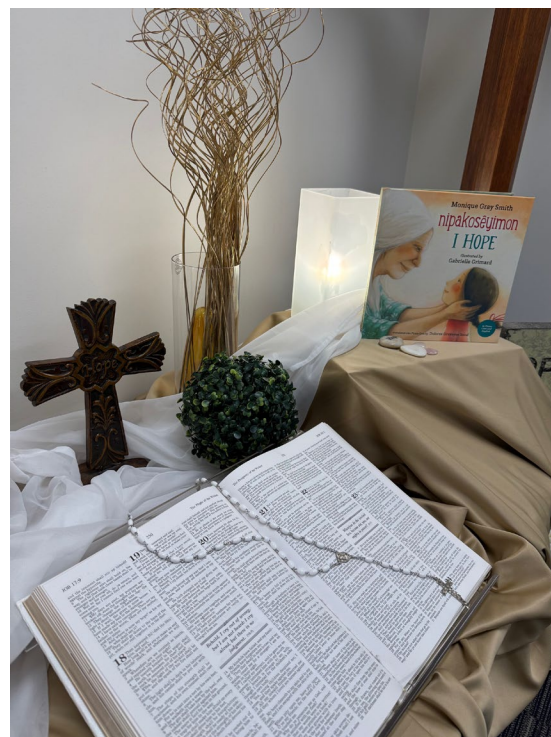
B. THE SCHOOL, PARISH, AND HOME

In addition to the school-parish-home relationship, which remains a cornerstone of Catholic education, Catholic Education Week and Sacramental preparation also provide students with formative encounters with grace and community.

❖ Catholic Education Week

Catholic Education Week - *Anchored in Christ, A Beacon of Hope* (May 10–15, 2026), offers a meaningful opportunity to celebrate the distinctiveness and vitality of Catholic education. Besides external resources developed in collaboration with the ACSTA, Religious Education Services has created a division-wide Liturgy of the Word for Monday, May 11th. By participating in a shared liturgical experience across all schools and sites, the division reinforces its collective identity as a faith community. The intentional design of Catholic Education Week highlights several key priorities:

- Promoting a unified spiritual experience across schools
- Supporting educators with practical and meaningful resources
- Encouraging student participation in faith-centred activities
- Strengthening the visible expression of Catholic identity



Catholic Education Week serves not only as a celebration, but as a catalyst, inviting schools to reflect on their mission and renew their commitment to forming students in faith, hope, and love. Here are some other strategies that will foster and promote Catholic Education Week in our schools:

- Displaying Catholic art in the classrooms and hallways
- Meeting with the school's local Pastor to support the school-parish-home relationship
- Creating optimal learning opportunities related to the Catholic faith

❖ A Shared Responsibility

Edmonton Catholic Schools supports this mission by promoting alignment with the archdiocese-established *Standards for Preparing Children and Youth for the Sacraments*. The Standards emphasize that sacramental preparation is a collaborative effort involving:

- Schools
- Parishes
- Families



Each partner plays a distinct and essential role. Schools contribute by fostering religious understanding, nurturing faith development, and encouraging participation in parish-based sacramental programs.

❖ **School-Parish Collaboration**

Administrators, too, play a critical role in shaping the vision, culture, and effectiveness of their schools. Their leadership ensures that goals are aligned, resources are used wisely, and communities are supported with clarity and purpose. In many ways, the strength of a school depends on the commitment and insights of its administrators. Like other responsibilities, administrators are also expected to meet regularly with local pastors to discuss:

- Liturgical planning
- Pastoral needs
- Sacramental initiatives

In many areas, these partnerships are strong and fruitful, reflecting a shared commitment to building the Kingdom of God, working closely to support students and families, and creating cohesive and supportive faith communities. In some regions, parish leaders are navigating significant pastoral demands. There is a shared desire among parish and school leaders to maintain strong, respectful relationships grounded in open communication and mutual support. Within an established and positive school parish relationship, continued engagement, relationship-building, and clear, flexible communication structures support effective sacramental preparation and the ongoing strengthening of the partnership.

❖ **Deepening Partnerships**

The school-parish partnership continues to be a central priority for the Division. Last year marked a major step forward as Division leadership and priests of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton gathered in a spirit of communion and shared mission. This coming together affirmed the essential role Catholic schools play in supporting parents as they nurture faith in their children, while also serving as a vital bridge between the home and the parish. The opportunity to share a meal, engage in open conversation about both the strengths and complexities of our partnership, and celebrate the Eucharist together strengthened relationships and deepened mutual understanding. These moments of connection support the Division's ongoing mission of catechesis and evangelization and reflect a shared commitment to bring the Gospel of Christ to the families we serve. With the recent installation of Archbishop Stephen Hero, the next school-parish meeting is October 28, 2026. With the presence of His Grace, Archbishop Stephen Hero, Archdiocesan leadership, local pastors, and division administrators, this gathering aims to:

- Foster dialogue and mutual understanding
- Address barriers to collaboration
- Reinforce shared responsibilities
- Find practical ways to support sacramental participation

By uniting everyone, the Division shows its commitment to deepening our rich partnership with the parishes and to enhancing the sacramental experience for students.



❖ Integrating the Journey: From Identity to Assurance

The actions outlined in this report are not isolated efforts; they are interconnected elements of a broader journey. *Bishops' Assurance* and the School-Parish-Home relationship all contribute to a deeper realization of Catholic identity.

The *Five Marks of Catholic Identity* provide a foundation, a description of what Catholic schools are called to be. *Bishops' Assurance* builds on this foundation by asking how well these Marks are lived and how they can grow. This shift reflects a more mature understanding of identity:

- From definition to practice
- From intention to evidence
- From maintenance to renewal

For us, the School-Parish-Home context embodies it. *Bishops' Assurance* sustains and strengthens it.

CONCLUSION

For many years, Edmonton Catholic Schools has intentionally and faithfully strengthened Catholic identity through the *Five Marks of Catholic School Identity*, supported by Board policy, divisional planning, faith formation initiatives, leadership development, and school-based practice. This work has been embedded in the culture of our schools and departments and continues to shape daily decisions and experiences for students and staff. The move toward *Bishops' Assurance* does not signal a beginning point; rather, it represents an alignment that builds on this established foundation by providing a consistent assurance lens across Catholic school divisions. This shift formalizes and makes visible the depth of work already underway, moving the system from well-established practice toward a shared, transparent model that offers confidence in the Church, trustees, families, and the broader community that Catholic identity is lived, strengthened, and renewed in intentional and accountable ways.

Edmonton Catholic Schools is engaged in a meaningful journey of learning and growth. Through intentional planning, collaborative relationships, and a commitment to continuous improvement, the Division is deepening its Catholic identity in both visible and transformative ways. The move toward *Bishops Assurance* challenges the system to reflect honestly, act purposefully, and witness authentically. It recognizes that true growth in faith is ongoing; rooted in grace, guided by discernment, and sustained through community.

As the Division continues this journey, it does so with a clear understanding: Catholic education is not simply about preserving tradition, but about living it fully, courageously, and faithfully in today's world.



Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

— Romans 12:12 —



Lumen Christi Catholic Education Centre

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