

**Edmonton Catholic School District  
Parent Newsletters**

**September 2018**

**What I Learned Over the Summer:  
Martyrdom and Witnessing to the Beauty of Faith**

After a relaxing and enjoyable summer, we return once again to the classroom, renewed and full of excitement as a new School Year begins.

When I was a student, our teacher would welcome us back, then invite each of us to share something special that happened during summer vacation.

In keeping with this tradition, one of the highlights of my summer was a trip to Ukraine. I sit on an international advisory committee with Patriarch Sviatoslav, the Father and Head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church worldwide. Our small group of five bishops (we affectionately call ourselves the “G5”) is a bit of a “think tank,” reflecting on the where the Holy Spirit is calling us to be as Church in the years to come. (Now my friends – if I may call them that – asked me “How in the world did I get on a think tank?” Of course, what I heard was, “Oh, how wonderful, Bishop David, that you’re part of this exciting and visioning process!”)

Anyway, after two days of meetings, I took part in a pilgrimage to Stradch, near Lviv, western Ukraine. In 1951, Rev. Mykola Konrad, the local pastor, was called to make a sick call to an elderly parishioner. Today, that would not be anything extraordinary. However, in 1951, communism was in full strength and the Church was outlawed in the Soviet Union. Father Mykola, accompanied by the parish cantor, Volodymyr Pryjma, went in secret to administer the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Penance to a member of their flock. Perhaps it was a setup by the communists. When they arrived, they were killed on the spot, dying the death of a martyr for the faith.

Each year, this year included, the local parish in Stradch organizes a pilgrimage in honour of the Holy Martyrs Father Mykola Konrad and Cantor Volodymyr Pryjma. The pilgrimage Divine Liturgy was lead by Patriarch Sviatoslav, 12 bishops (including me), and 200 priests. If that is not awesome in and of itself, some 30,000 children, youth, families, and elderly men and women joined in the celebration, many walking on foot the 15 kilometre trek from Lviv! To say it was inspiring sells it short; I was spellbound. The event instilled in me faith beyond words.

**Martyrdom. Witness.**

All of us may not be called to martyrdom like Father Konrad and Cantor Pryjma (thank God!) However, the scriptural meaning of martyrdom (from the Greek *marturia*) means witness. Indeed, the entire mission of the Church, entrusted to us by Jesus, is to give witness to the love of God the Father in the world today. Jesus, after his resurrection from the dead and just before he ascends to heaven and to the Father, tells his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

During this new School Year, may you and I be true witnesses of Jesus’s love and mercy to our classmates, teachers, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, neighbours, and strangers.

And, in so doing, let us recall the words attributed to Saint Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary, use words.”

Have a great School Year!

God bless!

Bishop David