

J U N E 2 0 1 1

Sharing the Voice

Celebrating the Spirit!



Come Alive!
A Conference for Change

Learning to do Good:
The Value of Ontario's Catholic
Schools



A Halton Catholic District School Board Student Reflection
on Catholic Education Week 2011

Achieving...Believing...Belonging!

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Dear Friends,

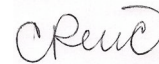
Celebrating the Spirit!

It is my great honour and privilege to present to you the Halton Catholic District School Board's (HCDSB) student publication, "Sharing the Voice: Celebrating the Spirit!" The works you will find within this magazine are representative of the many diverse perspectives that exist within our Board. Although the students who contributed them may come from different areas of our region, and range in age from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12, their heartfelt, honest messages show striking similarities. The students recognize the vital role that Catholic schools play within our community, our province, and the world.

Ontario's Catholic community celebrated Catholic Education week from May 2nd to May 6th. This exciting week, set aside each year, gives us an opportunity to take time out of our busy lives to reflect on the unique mission we have as Catholic students, and educators. "Sharing the Voice: Celebrating the Spirit!" is a manifestation of not only the incredible initiatives we took part in within our schools during Catholic Education Week, but one that commemorates the wonderful contributions Catholic schools make to their communities all year round. Our insightful writers were asked to share some of their experiences this past school year, and reflect on how these experiences have helped them to grow as students, and as Christ-like, faith-filled individuals.

It is my most sincere hope that while reading, you will take the opportunity to reflect upon the special place Catholic Education has in your heart, and in your life.

Yours in Catholic Education,



Christiane Peric
North Halton Student Trustee
Christ the King Catholic S.S.
Editor, Sharing the Voice
2010-2011



Student Trustees with Alice Anne LeMay, Chair of the Halton Catholic District School Board at the "Come Alive!" Conference on May 6th, 2011.



Ontario's Catholic Students Light the Way

By: Laura, Grade 11 Student, Christ the King Catholic S.S.

I was honoured to have been given the opportunity to attend the first inaugural Ontario Catholic Student Leadership Conference, held in Niagara Falls from March 31st to April 2nd. Not only did we get the chance to meet other students from within our Board, but we also had the chance to meet fellow Catholic students from across the province.

We were gathered to discuss the importance of Catholic Education in our lives, but the most important thing that we talked about were ways that we can preserve Catholic faith in youth. Divided up into small discussion groups, we came up with varying themes that we would later vote on, in order of importance. We touched base on our vision for Catholic Education for the future, the highlights and strengths of being a part of a Catholic community, and the challenges that Catholic Education may face in the future. The results that we got from this were astounding, since the data was collected from students themselves. It's kind of empowering to know that our opinions on the subject do matter, especially since we are the ones directly affected. We were given a voice, and it was not something that was taken for granted.

The results were as follows:

- We, the students, hope that in the future, everyone will be welcomed and accepted as individuals.
- Our vision also includes a vibrant and caring community in which students and staff are enthusiastically involved.
- We found that the strengths of our faith are our inclusivity, respectfulness, and the fact that we are connected worldwide through calls for social justice.
- In the future, we think that the media's negative focus on Catholicism may be a challenge. The media has a knack for focusing on the negative side of things. Like Father Roberts said in his address, if you are told to memorize everything that is coloured blue around you, and you close your eyes, you will not be able to recall anything that was green from memory. It's the same with the media and negative stories. When you are bombarded with negative information about a topic, that negative information becomes the only thing you associate with it.
- We also fear the lack of government funding in the future.

We obtained some really good results, and although those discussions were the main focus

of the conference, there was some room for fun as well. The Niagara CDSB Student Senate organized various outings in Niagara Falls that we could choose from. From a journey behind the falls to an excursion to Clifton Hill, there were several options to choose from. We went as separate groups, and had the chance to meet new people as well as spent time with people whom we already knew. In addition to that, there was also a trivia night, as well as a dance. Both proved to be great opportunities to network and be social. Personally, I had a great time making new friends, and discovering how alike our lifestyles are no matter where we come from.

The first inaugural Ontario Catholic Student Leadership Conference was definitely a success. I think this is mainly because students, for students, put it together. Hopefully the results we got from our poll will give us an idea of what we can do - individually and as a community - to help preserve our Catholic Education system.

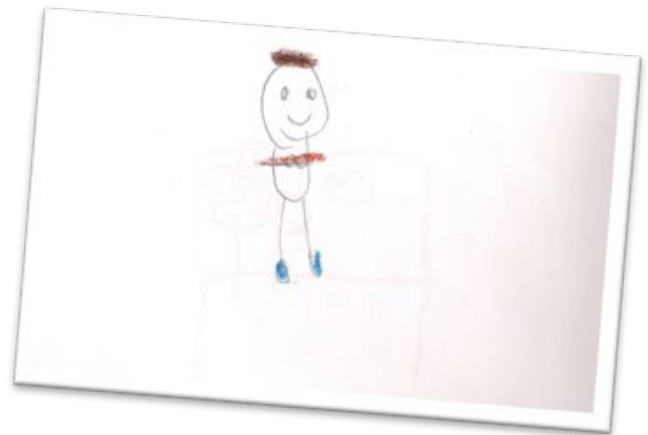
Letter Writing at St. Michael School

Primary

Dear Minister Dombrowsky,

Catholic school communities are important to us because we try our best to be like Jesus. We do not bully people because we know that Jesus wouldn't do that. We go to mass and pray at church. We listen to the priest so we can be like Jesus.

From,
Ashleigh



St. Michael Catholic School is special because it teaches us to love God.
~Nathan



St. Michael Catholic School is special because Jesus is everywhere.
~Kayla

Who are role models of faith in your school?

The teachers are really nice and they are respectful. They also always link all the subjects we do with our Focus on Faith theme.

~Ashlynn, St. Paul

Junior

Dear Minister Dombrowsky,

I am writing to share why I think that the Catholic Education system is important. Catholic schools teach us great values of life, helping us to make healthy choices through our lives. Catholic schools are very unique and distinct. They are important to students and it would be sad without them. Catholic schools teach students about God and Jesus Christ and how they can make our lives better. Catholic schools are different from public schools because unlike public schools, Catholic schools set aside many hours to teach faith, understanding, and the words of the Lord to children at a young age, hoping to instill a more contentious and peaceful way of life for them here on Earth. Catholic schools are important for children because they help them make choices for the better in their lives. It would be sad if there was no Catholic education system because then we wouldn't get to learn about God.

Sincerely,

Vanessa



St. Michael Catholic School is special
because we pray to Jesus.
~Nikola

Intermediate

Dear Minister Dombrowsky,

I would like to talk to you about my school, and why I love the fact that it's a Catholic school. My parents were born and raised Catholics, so they found it important to send their kids to a Catholic school, where they knew we would be taught, and would practise our faith. Everyday, I go to school and know that I'll pray, and have a class about God, and His importance. Catholic schools provide a place for us children to practice our faith. It teaches us to follow God's examples and it helps to talk about our values and morals. My school is right beside a church, which is a bonus because it is much easier to celebrate our faith with liturgies and masses. Some people say that Catholic schools are stricter, and less violent, which I can agree with. We have a much more structured system, and a lot more control, which will help us in the long run. We should be allowed to share our faith in a school community, and we should be allowed to have someone teach us our faith, so we can further practice it. Our schools make this fun for us; they have youth rallies, retreats, and liturgies to help us learn more. It's important that we can share our faith without offending others or being hesitant about our beliefs. Overall, Catholic schools shouldn't be torn down, because they are too important to people, like the people in my school, and anyone else that practises the Catholic faith.

Sincerely,

Nicole

Come Alive! A Conference for Change

By: Sarah, grade 12 student at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic S.S.



Students arrive and are welcomed and registered by Student Senator leaders



Celebrating mass as a Catholic learning community with Fr. Loza of Corpus Christi Catholic S.S.

Why are you in a Catholic school?

We are here because we want to learn about our faith.

~Dmitri, St. Paul

On May 6th, 2011, students from all over the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) came together to participate in Come Alive 2011, a conference by youth for youth to bring awareness and education to various social issues. It was hosted in the new building of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, Oakville.

Any student who has attended St. Thomas Aquinas (STA) during the construction years will understand the excitement that comes with hosting an event as grand as this. When the HCDSB Student Trustees announced that the conference might be held at St. Thomas Aquinas, the STA Senators all shared the same bewildered reaction,

“A board-wide event at STA? You’re kidding.”

This news came first semester when school meant 24 portables and when many students were still skeptical about the new building ever being built for second semester. But at last, the beautiful, highly anticipated new building came, soon to be host to such a successful event that was Come Alive 2011.

For months, the HCDSB Student Senate had planned for the conference, putting together workshops that would inform our student guests while inviting them to come up with solutions that are true to Gospel Teachings. The workshop I took part in organizing was called, “One Band: One Sound”, which was centred around issues of Equity and Inclusion. Our goal was to encourage both concepts through discussion and activities, first raising awareness of the various issues that exist, and then coming up with ways to implement solutions in our schools. My fellow Student Senators and I were thrilled with the participation of the students in the workshop, where they enthusiastically carried the conversation. Our guests really opened up, sharing stories and expressing ideas that lead to meaningful conversation, which positively addressed problems of discrimination and ways to combat it.

Aside from a day jammed-pack with workshops, we were quite excited for our guest speaker, Me to We’s Scott

Hammell, famous for his ability to free himself from a straight jacket. As an escape artist and human rights advocate, his words of motivation made him the perfect choice for Come Alive. His story, which was a perfect combination of perseverance and determination, truly gave the youth in the audience the confidence that they needed in order to believe that they could achieve anything. After he delivered his address, students crowded towards him for photos and autographs, all giving him the same feedback: "Thank you for inspiring me".

Overall, the day was a complete success. Students were engaged, educated and inspired. They were also given an opportunity to explore leadership, and what that means for us as Catholic Students. We are called to serve those around us, and respect everyone, just as Jesus did. Even more so, it was fun. Community-building events such as these are so important, for they bring students together and help us realize that we are not alone, but working alongside each other for a common goal of a community where all are loved and accepted.



Student Senators prepare for the workshops



Workshops!



Keynote speaker Scott Hammell



Presenting Speak Up projects at the lunch-time Speak Up Project Carousel



A celebratory Student Senate fruit roll-up hug. Feel the love!

*When I'm in a Catholic School, I feel like every day I've learned and achieved something.
~Kwame, Guardian Angels*

St. Catherine of Alexandria “Light of Change” Initiatives

The 2010/2011 academic year has been an exciting time for the community of St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic Elementary School in Georgetown. The student body has worked diligently to support causes that ultimately improve the condition of those less fortunate. This year’s student council theme is known as the *Light of Change* with leaders who work for the betterment of all people, by mirroring the light of Christ. Over the course of the past eight months, these exemplary students performed several acts to raise not only money, but also awareness of the importance of lending a helping hand. The money that they have presently raised and continue to raise will go toward building a well in Africa (sent through Free the Children), toward assisting our parish outreach program *Holy Cross Helps*, and toward sending student council members from Christ the King (CtK) Catholic Secondary School to the Dominican Republic to help build homes.

How do you know that you are in
a Catholic School?

*We take our faith into different subjects
and connect them to God.*

~Kayla, St. Paul

To date, the Catholic Student Council (with the help of the school community) has raised close to 7, 000 dollars. Their goal this year is to raise 10, 000 dollars. They have already had the privilege of writing a 2, 000 dollar cheque to CtK where some students recently travelled to the Dominican Republic to assist in a home’s construction project. Through various activities which include, selling Kernels popcorn and frozen treats to the student body, as well as Silly Bandz and bracelets that promoted anti-bullying during the month of November and finally providing a Busy Bee Market to parents and students during December to allow for the purchasing of various Catholic and religious Christmas items, the council has managed to directly support their chosen projects.

The students also promoted Catholic values by initiating February as the month of ARK (Acts of Random Kindness).



With this initiative students were encouraged to display various forms of kindness and compassion for one another, thus following in the footsteps of Jesus. This was witnessed through a friendly hello, holding the door, or playing with someone new, all in an attempt to prove that making a difference in the life of another person can start right in your own school community.

During the weeks of Lent, the student council sold various religious items such as bracelets, crosses and rosaries to prepare the students for Easter. Items were sold to the student body to further exemplify Easter as one of the most important days in the Catholic calendar. We reflect as a

Catholic community on the importance of the death of our Saviour, who while alive, preached about the importance of equality and love for all people. Easter is also recognized as a time where we reflect on how Jesus lived and died for the well-being of all humankind. By advertising and promoting this solemn event students were not only able to bring this awareness to the school community, but

did so in a way that fostered continued financial support for our brothers and sisters in need.

Ultimately the council's objective is that through each of these events, the school will reach their final goal. It is the sole mission of our Catholic leaders to affirm that as followers of Christ we will truly exemplify the practice of unconditional love. In doing so we will follow in the words of Jesus himself when he stated, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me (Matthew 25:46)."* We are therefore, all capable of being a beacon of hope, a light of change. By living the motto of coming together as a Catholic community to help others, will enable each of us to accomplish positive change and thus a difference can be achieved!

Me to We's Take Action Youth Leadership Training Program engages students by teaching them what it means to be an active local and global citizen, while drawing the clear and critical connections to our Catholic faith with their teachers and peers. Within the HCDSB, twelve elementary schools (Holy Rosary, Milton, featured in the pictures above and previous), five secondary schools, and the Student Senate are participating in these programs.



The HCDSB Goes Green!

The Ontario EcoSchools program is one that 35 of our schools have committed to. It is based on four main principles: ecological literacy, waste minimization, energy conservation, and school ground greening. The ties to Catholic Social Teaching are clear, as we are all called to be stewards of God's creation. EcoSchools initiatives invite everyone to get involved, and bring the students, staff, and broader community of a school together to create meaningful change.

Want to learn more about how you can get involved with EcoSchools?
Visit: <http://www.ontarioecoschools.org/>

Burlington Students bring HOPE to the Dominican Republic

By: Chanice and Samantha, Grade 12 students at Assumption Catholic S.S.

H.O.P.E. - Home, Opportunity, Prosperity, Education. To write down everything that has happened to us during this trip would be next to impossible. HOPE stands for more than just those four words, HOPE means making a difference not only in our lives, but in somebody else's. It means providing people with dignity, working towards solidarity, promoting human rights and sharing the common good.

*The whole idea of taking faith and applying it in your everyday life really pushed me to actually **want** to learn and understand more about God.*

~Caroline, Guardian Angels

Participating in our school's HOPE trip really was a life changing event for the both of us and neither of us can imagine doing anything different.

Our most recent mission trip took place in March 2011, which consisted of us along with eight other high school students. Although we have both been a part of two previous enriching experiences, this last endeavor has by far been the most passion filled, eye-opening, trip yet. Upon arrival, we had knowledge about the family that we were building and providing for. However, we did not realize this would be the neediest family we would ever come across, and the significant impact it would have on our lives forever.

Juan Antonio, a 58 year old resident of the Dominican Republic, had been living in the mountains, approximately two hours away from the closest village via a mule path. He was unemployed, but would occasionally sell coffee beans for a small profit. His family, consisting of his wife, 26, and his two sons Juando, 4, and Josaidi, 3, lived in an 'establishment' comparable to a mud hut with palm tree leaves as the roof, and ate one meal every two to three days. Our group became very close to this family and it became very clear as to what a necessity is, along with the difference between need and want. We soon noticed that the children had two outfits, one for every other day, with no shoes that fit or that were protective from disease or infection. It was very hard for us to digest this, as things such as this don't exist at home.



We had been informed that Juan Antonio's wife had special needs and needed help taking care of her children, especially their hygiene. It was heartbreaking to know this family was struggling and that there was no help available like we have here in Canada. Both Juan Antonio and his wife knew the benefits of personal hygiene; however, the barrier stopping them from cleaning their children was lack of supplies to do so, along with money to buy these things. Through conversation with Juan Antonio one

day, he expressed his thanks for our group building his house, but also drastically improving their lives to a level they never could have imagined. He left us with these words, as we will leave them with you, "No one has ever done anything for me in my life, which is why this is so important to me. Thank you very much for finding me and coming back to ensure I got a house, and please, never forget me."



Being a part of HOPE really changes the outlook one has on life. This trip provides one with experiences and lessons you could never gain anywhere else. We had never witnessed so much Catholic faith in action before visiting

Where do you see Catholic Social Teachings in the community?

In a community, we need to work together to accomplish things while helping each other (Community and the Common Good).

~Marcus, St. Paul

the Dominican. The people in the mountain villages have very little when it comes to material objects, yet these people seem happier than any one of us. Their entire lives are put under their faith and trust in God. The community sticks together, and they become one large family – raising children, growing up and surviving together. If we could take one lesson and share it among everyone in the world, it would be to not take anything for granted, and be happy for even the littlest things in life, because so many people have nothing. We really don't need material objects to be happy, and the people in Dominican helped us see that. They may not be rich in wealth, but they are richer in spirit than we could ever imagine.



Marching for Life

On May 12th, HCDSB students headed to Ottawa to participate in the March for Life on Parliament hill. They proudly stood up for the dignity of life in all forms.

Pictured left: Christ the King Catholic S.S. Students participating in the March for Life

What's Your Issue?

In the fall of 2010, the Student Senate ran a "What's your issue?" t-shirt campaign. Each of our Board's eight secondary schools was given several shirts, which were blank to allow the students to fill them in with ideas on how we can improve our Catholic school system within Halton. The ideas generated from the t-shirts inspired the workshop topics for the May 6th Student Senate Conference.

Pictured right: Oakville senators meet to create the t-shirts which were distributed to schools



France, je t'aime

By: Trisha, Grade 11 student at St. Ignatius of Loyola Catholic S.S.

Federico Fellini once said, "A different language is a different version of life." Like any language course, Grade 10 French was challenging. It came with its grammar rules and its presentations, but it also came with opportunity. It was through that course that I became aware of CEEF, the Canadian

Educational Exchange Foundation. It was then, that I decided I was serious about learning French. I wanted to be immersed in the culture in every way possible. So I applied to be part of an exchange, and much to my surprise I found myself hosting a French student in my house a couple of months later.

Hosting someone completely new, and being forced into a relationship with a stranger, is not easy. However those three months went by fairly quickly and in February I was filled with anxiety and excitement, for I was leaving for France. Lots of thoughts accompanied me on my journey, most of all I couldn't believe I was actually doing it, and that it was actually happening.

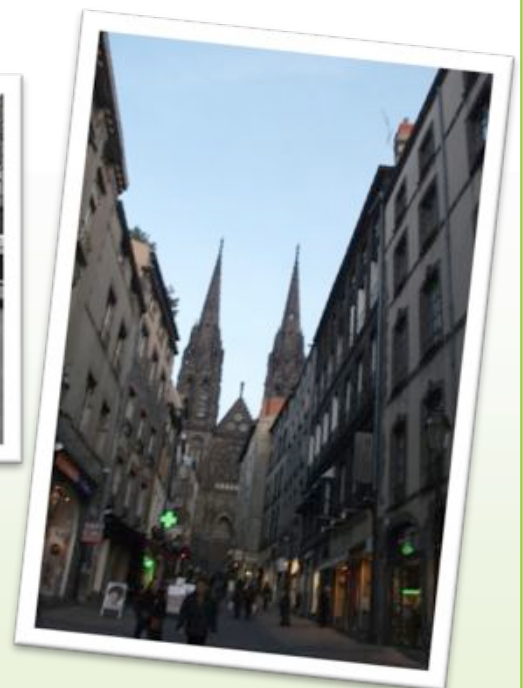
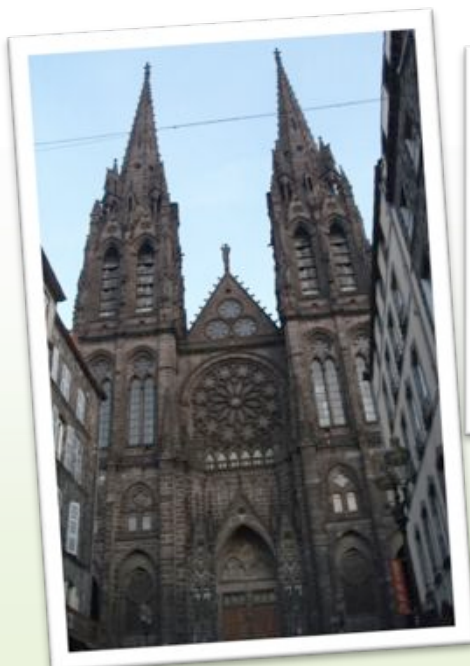
I could probably spend hours and hours writing about my experience, the great times, the places I visited, as well as the not so great times. I could write about how intriguing it was learning a new language, being immersed in a completely different culture, and warding off French stereotypes. However, I would prefer to share the most important thing about my trip; that going to France was life-changing. In order to really understand what I mean, one would have to go through something similar; I can do my best to tell how it was, but the experience is indescribable. A lot of people expected me to come back saying it was the best experience of my life, and in many ways it helped me discover who I am. But it was also something I had not prepared for completely. There were periods of immense sadness and homesickness, and although those were counteracted by my great experiences, had someone told me how hard it was going to be, I would have been more ready.

I would definitely encourage any student wishing to embark on a similar experience, because it is truly incredible and it teaches one a lot. I can happily say that I can have a full-out conversation with someone who speaks French, and I do definitely plan on revisiting one day. I would also take a heed of caution though: three months is a long time, being away from family and friends can take a toll, so be strong in who you are and what you believe in. As for the country of France? I have one word; merci!

Why is it important to be in a Catholic school?

I think it is good to be in a Catholic school because I get to practice my religion and I get to pray a lot. We relate religion to a lot of other subjects.

~Antonia, St. Paul



City sights in Clermont-Ferrand, my home in France

Regional Forum Encourages Students to Speak Up!

On April 20th, 100 students from the Halton District and Halton Catholic District School Boards met at Mainway Community Centre in Burlington for a Regional Forum facilitated by the Ministry of Education on the topic of Student Councils, and how they can promote student engagement. The forum was run using open space technology, which allowed the students to guide their conversation, without an overly structured agenda. Lively conversation lasted all day, and led to the creation of 14 reports, the provincial record thus far!



Getting ready for an exciting day!



Putting all the "BIG IDEAS" together



Our wonderful facilitator, Cameron, who helped ensure the day went smoothly



Reflecting on next steps

Acknowledgements

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- The Ontario Ministry of Education



Speak Up!

Each year, Ontario's Speak Up initiative works towards enhancing the Student Voice and ensuring that all students are engaged at school. This is done in a variety of ways including the Minister of Education's Student Advisory Council (MSAC), Regional Forums, and Speak Up Grants, which all motivate students to get involved in making their schools better places to learn. This year, the HCDSB was fortunate to have been granted 16 Speak Up grants for elementary schools, and 6 for secondary schools. There are also two HCDSB students on this year's MSAC.

This magazine is a Speak Up project.

Want to get more involved with Speak Up?

Visit: www.ontario.ca/speakup





Did you enjoy what you've read?

Check out the newly re-designed
student tab at hcdsb.org for
more!

Now including "Student Spirit" pages
as well as a variety of learning and
Student Voice resources

Focus on Faith!

HEAR the Word of the Lord, LEARN to do Good, SEEK Justice

God of Justice and Love,
You created us in your own image
and gave us the wonderful gift of life.

You planted in our hearts
the desire to love and be loved
and in your Son, Jesus,
gave us the perfect example
of how to live.

Bless us with your grace
and give us the strength and courage
to live for the good of others
rather than ourselves.

May we always be open to
hear your Word,
as we learn to do good
and seek justice in our world.

Amen.

As Halton Catholic District School Board Student Trustees, we are committed to promoting awareness of issues affecting our students and our ability to enhance the importance of student voice.

