



***Inaugural Address
Loren Demelo, 2009 Board Chair***

Reverend Father, Distinguished Guests, Fellow Trustees, Members of Senior Administration, Friends of Catholic Education, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining me tonight in this celebration of Catholic education. An inauguration signals a start. You start from somewhere, someplace, and the starting point provides both reference and a foundation. So your support and encouragement are very much appreciated.

As I begin, I would like to give my thanks to John Ferris, 2008 Chair of the Board, for his service and stewardship.

To my fellow trustees, it is my great honour to be chosen to serve as Chair for 2009.

Thank you for sharing this moment with me and I am humbled by your confidence in me. As John F. Kennedy once observed "we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them", and I pledge to you that I will give my very best to serve.

Tonight we celebrate a distinctive institutional culture through a keen sense of place and deep respect for our natural environment with the embrace of Jesus, (Bush said in his Inaugural), his purpose is achieved in our duty, and our duty is fulfilled in service to one another. (at times he had some wisdom)

We will develop the processes by which we will clarify our purpose and our values and translate them into measurable goals, I will cover a few areas this evening, our Catholic Identity, Student learning, communication, lasting relationships, and improvement plans for good places to learn.

Catholic Identity

Our distinction, I would argue, is as much in the manner of our performance as it is in the purpose of our mission. The elements of our identity and mission inform our values, as they should. But, they also contain the case for our distinction.

There was a clear message from the province-wide discussion known as "Our Catholic Schools", a message that we need to listen to today and one we need to respond to in the weeks and months ahead.

Over 30,000 Catholic parents, teachers, business and community leaders, students, administrators and other supporters from across the province participated in a dialogue. Our Catholic communities told us that they want Catholic school boards to inform and support them in their efforts to be more engaged and involved in strengthening publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario.

Arising from this discussion was the clear message that there is a need to engage the wider Catholic community in more regular and meaningful ways around the goals and achievements of the Catholic system.

One of the ways we have done that is with the development of a brochure outlining the distinctive nature of Catholic education, a brochure that was shared with each family in our school system and each Parish within our three counties.

Another is the continuing presence of the exhibit "The One Called Jesus", which is being shown at our schools and our parishes. Many of our parents have been and will be attending this remarkable exhibit in the future.

We will find new ways to reach out and to spread our message. It is one of our Strategic Priorities for 2008-2009.

Communication

We will work to enhance communication with and service to students, staff, parents, volunteers, parishes and Catholic School Councils. We will emphasize improving communication and information management throughout the District. This Catholic school board, this community, the goals we define, the challenges we face, the hopes we share will carry us through to the future success of our system.

Student Learning

High performance requires a foundation of high expectations, as always, a top priority will be to improve learning for our students. We will promote the concept of schools as inclusive Catholic learning communities under the leadership of the school principal. We will use evidence-based decision making to determine learning priorities, monitor and guide progress to sustain continuous improvement toward achieving identified targets, at both the system and school level.

There is a renewed sense of optimism for improving student achievement and for reducing the achievement gap between schools. The Board's Literacy/Numeracy Secretariat – Focused Intervention Partnership is showing benefits.

The partnership provides support for schools attaining low performances in EQAO assessment, strengthens and supports instructional leadership and classroom practices and implements research-based strategies to improve student learning.

Our EQAO results are consistently above provincial averages. This work will only help to increase them.

We will also work to reduce the gender gap that exists in many of our test results. For all parents with sons like myself, this commitment to student success must be preserved.

We will ensure that schools develop, implement and evaluate annual school improvement plans, which address Catholic faith development and literacy and numeracy outcomes. Literacy and numeracy are essential building blocks of education and serve to enhance a student's progress across all curricular areas.

Capital Plans

We will also put an emphasis on accountability. We will develop long-term and preventative maintenance strategies to extend the life of Board buildings. And we will use information technology effectively toward enhancing human resources management. The London District Catholic School Board is in an enviable position, compared to many other school boards in Ontario. Our enrolment is holding, but we have identified challenges in the future which will enable us to fulfill our promise more actively.

We will continue to work toward our goal of reducing portable classrooms and providing permanent facilities for each student in both elementary and secondary. We will work to reach consensus on how this can be done by carefully examining boundaries and available resources and careful planning to deal with the ever changing and shifting demographics of Southwestern Ontario.

Several major building projects are at or near completion, which will improve school facilities all across the district.

In St. Thomas, work is underway at the site of the new St. Anne's Catholic Elementary School, which will combine the school communities of St. Gabriel's and St. Raphael's. Major additions have been completed at St. Michael's and St. Patrick's in Woodstock as well as St. Jude, St. Mark in London, St. David in Dorchester and Monsignor Morrison in St. Thomas. There are also major additions at St. Theresa and St. Paul in London.

On the horizon, the Board has approved, in principle, plans for a new Catholic Secondary School in London. Secondary students also deserve a class setting within the school in which to learn. It is important to remember that this money does not come out of the classroom, but rather from capital funds. All of these projects will improve our ability to provide positive learning experiences for our students.

Lasting Relationships

There are many people to thank tonight.

I want to give a special thank you to our Director, Wilma de Rond, for her leadership. She sets the tone for our Catholic learning communities.

We are blessed with a strong team of Senior Administrators and Principals who are models of Catholic leadership.

Our teachers are dedicated professionals who always put their students first. Our support personnel do a superb job everyday. My personal thanks for support from Lucy, Noreen, Sue our newest secretary and John, staff who simply do what they do well, everyday – all with an inspirational passion for this place and Catholic education.

Our Bishop, Ronald Fabbro, our Board Chaplain, Father Jim Mockler, our parish priests and parish teams provide the vital third side of our triangle of home, school and parish that supports the very foundation of Catholic education.

Thank you to the parents who entrust to us the care and nurturing of their children. This is a sacred trust and on which we take very seriously.

Catholic Trustees believe positive engagement in the Catholic school community will support the government's goal to build public confidence as a whole in Ontario's publicly-funded school system.

Every school in the province benefits from parent and community engagement in the success and operation of local schools. Parents and other community residents who contribute their insight, constructive ideas and energy serve to keep our schools vital and nurturing places for students.

Before I continue further thank you to my family, whose support, sacrifices, encouragement and patience will allow me to carry out the many duties associated with being the Chair. Thank you, I love you...

I want to thank the Ministry of Education for all its leadership in helping us to settle contracts with all of our employee groups, which will assure we can work together as a

united team for the next four years. The Ministry stepped forward in admittedly tough economic times, where purses are being tightened, to assure stability in our Board.

Thank you to the employee groups who worked with us to achieve this stability. Thank you to those who worked on behalf of the board and who work tirelessly to ensure we present balanced budgets year after year.

Thank you to our co-terminous boards, who work together with us in so many areas towards the same common goals.

The London District Catholic School Board is now entering its second decade as an amalgamated board.

We have many accomplishments over the first decade that we can be proud of. For proof, we can point to the Ministry of Education's Operational Review conducted during the past school year.

The Review looked at four areas: Governance and School Board Administration; Human Resources Management and School Staffing; Financial Management; and School Board Operations and Facilities. It found the Board to be "well-managed, based on the fact it has adopted a significant number of leading practices in all of the functional areas reviewed."

We should all be very proud of this positive confirmation of the Board's policies, practices and procedures.

The sky is the limit for the next ten years and beyond.

Much of the credit for celebration has to go to my fellow trustees. My intention is not to put you on the spot but in the spotlight. You have played an integral part of my journey to this place. We celebrate our history as part of our identity and this is why I am going in this direction.

As I look around the table, I see more than 135 years of service to Catholic education, which is an amazing statistic.

The London District Catholic School Board is a rarity among school boards in the province and the country in that we accomplish our objectives through consensus. That approach is quite remarkable and is a tribute to the Trustees who sit around this table. It is tribute to their mutual respect and their trust as a team. I want to thank each of you and publicly acknowledge your contributions.

First, John Ferris: a trustee for more than thirty years with this board and its predecessor board. You have given so much to the service of Catholic education. It is a debt that can never be repaid and that goes for all of you as well.

Paul Whitehead has worked tirelessly for more than twenty-five years at the local level and as a strong voice for Catholic education at the provincial level. He has been a strong servant leader.

Patrick Smith always brings with him his many years of experience and the insights he has gained from working with our parent groups. He should also be recognized for his many years of service with the London Council for Adult Education.

Bill Hall, who served his community on the Elgin Board before joining our board at amalgamation. You have truly made our Board 25 per cent better.

Cliff Roach – you served faithfully on the Oxford Board before joining us in amalgamation. Because of your years of service we are all better for your having done that.

Anne Kavelaars – you have served the people of Middlesex County so faithfully and for so many years. Your voice of reason has added to our discussions for the past 14 years.

Sandra Cruz – you provide a new perspective for our Trustees. You are a concerned and involved parent whose voice deserves to be heard around the table.

And Student Trustee, Lauren Silvestro. You provide us with the perspective of the students and remind us of the primary reason we are here.

I thank each of you and ask that we give our trustees a round of applause to thank them for all that they do.

In closing, Ontario and the world are better off because of Catholic education. What our students achieve within the spirit of our Catholic Graduate Expectations and what they take with them when they go out into the world are the real gifts that Catholic education has to offer. Their success stories are our success stories.

With all of your help and support we should soar on the clarity of our values, the strength, the strength of our message, the integrity of our promise, and the joy of our endeavour to access a quality Catholic education.

“God is the source of all truth...” and education is “... the exciting adventure under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.

This I will commit to you, relying on God to grant me grace, wisdom and strength.

I thank you.