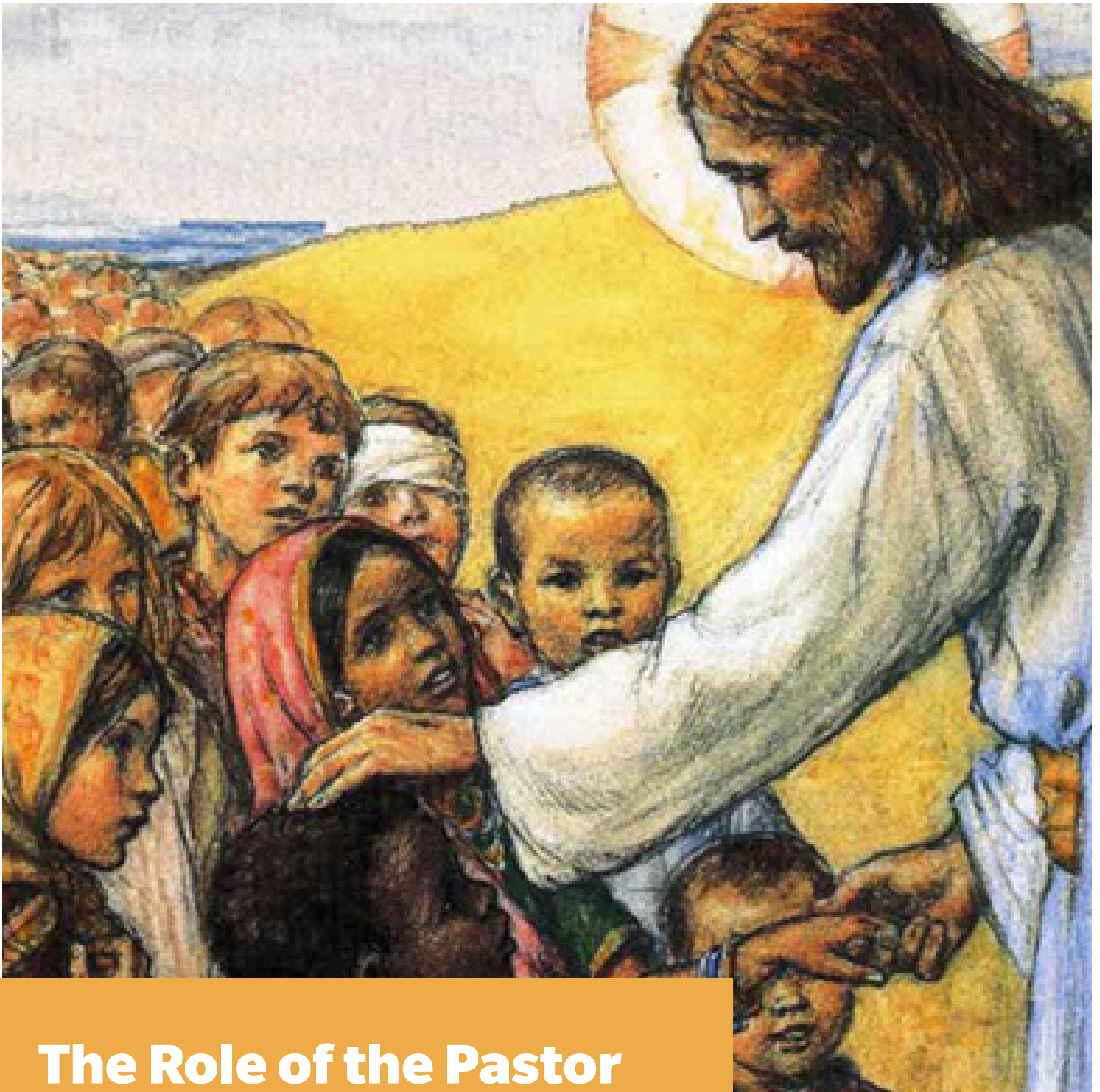




Archdiocese
of Toronto



The Role of the Pastor in the Catholic School: A Resource

*“Let the children
come to me.”*

*“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”*

Mark 10:14, 15

Included among the many responsibilities of a pastor is the pastoral care of the school or schools in his parish. This is clearly mandated in Thomas Cardinal Collins’ 2015 letter, *Norms Concerning the Relationship Between Our Parishes and Our Catholic Schools*. More than just an expectation, the pastoral care of a school is also an opportunity for **joyful evangelization**. This is mentioned as part of the Core Direction of the *Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Toronto*: Evangelization of Society (ii) “an ongoing partnership among the archdiocese, parishes, our publicly funded Catholic schools and students attending secular schools.”

Given the political structure of publicly funded Catholic schools, the role of the pastor is not to supervise but to support. This is done most effectively by **building relationships**. Given the workload of pastors and given the various personalities involved, challenges inevitably arise, including:

- Time demands
- Uncomfortable/frustrating previous experiences visiting the school
- Challenges with the secretary and/or principal
- Discouragement about the apparent lack of faith among students/staff
- Nervousness around students
- Nervousness around teachers who might not be practicing Catholics
- Poor students’ behaviour/lack of supervision during assemblies and Masses
- Not knowing what students are learning

While recognizing these challenges, the purpose of this resource is to provide a list of specific ways for pastors to engage the school, suggestions based on experience, for building relationships that will strengthen the connection between the parish and the school. These recommendations are grouped into seven categories:

1. Engage the principal
2. Engage the staff liaison/chaplaincy leader
3. Engage the students
4. Engage the school
5. Engage the teachers
6. Engage the parents
7. Engage your parishioners

INTRODUCTION FROM CARDINAL COLLINS

My Dear Brother Pastors of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

As we know, *Renewing the Promise: A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*, recently published by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, is a reflection and discernment on the past, present and future of Catholic education in Ontario.



The pastoral letter recognizes the important role played by the local pastor in making Catholic schools places where young people can encounter the person of Christ. We are blessed to live in a society with schools in which our faith can be openly proclaimed. Your ministry to schools is integral to our mission as Church.

In order to help you make the most of this wonderful opportunity for evangelization, our archdiocesan office of Liaison for Catholic Education has produced this resource, *The Role of the Pastor in the Catholic School*. It outlines best practices for strengthening the parish-school connection. It will come as no surprise that the key to success lies in building personal relationships while offering your joyful presence.

I am grateful for the role that you play, day in and day out, as pastors of our parishes, including your work in Catholic schools. Be assured of my prayers as we strive always to make our schools places where the young are formed in Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: **ENGAGE THE PRINCIPAL**

A healthy working relationship between the pastor and the principal is crucial to the development and maintenance of a strong parish-school connection. A mutual understanding that both are involved in the work of evangelization and that each is competent in their particular responsibility provides a solid starting point. The roles of principal and pastor are in some ways similar. Keep in mind that the support and approval of the pastor is highly valued by a school principal. The following are some suggestions for nurturing this relationship:

- Welcome the principal when there is a new appointment to the school
- Meet with the principal at the beginning of the school year
- Indicate your respect for the difficult task of a school administrator
- Signal your willingness to cooperate with the school
- Go through the calendar, important dates; coordinate school year with liturgical year
- Request the appointment of a school staff member to serve as a liaison with the parish
- If a lay pastoral associate is involved, stay abreast of how things are going
- Make or accept offers of hospitality
- Find opportunities to compliment the principal when positive things are noted
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: ENGAGE THE STAFF LIAISON / CHAPLAINCY LEADER

Sometimes, the school principal will serve as the liaison with the parish. Often, the principal will delegate a staff member to serve as the liaison with the parish. That person might be a classroom teacher or a chaplaincy leader in a high school. This provides you with another person on the school staff with whom you can build a relationship. If you have a good working relationship, the staff member will help the rest of the staff get to know you in a positive light. The following are some suggestions for nurturing this relationship:

- Meet with the delegate early in the school year
- Schedule meetings for the school year
- Discuss expectations for visits
- Be clear and explicit about requirements for liturgies/Masses
- Use or develop an agreed-upon framework for planning liturgies
- Debrief after school Masses, noting what went well and problem-solving together
- Provide positive feedback to the delegate's principal when appropriate
- Thank the staff liaison publicly
- Consider inviting the staff liaison to a parish volunteer appreciation event
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: ENGAGE THE STUDENTS

When you have the opportunity to visit classrooms and to interact with students, you are following in the footsteps of Christ the teacher. As an *alter Christus*, your presence alone might touch the lives of students in ways you'll never fully understand. You may be the only priest a child encounters. Your presence may contribute to a religious vocation in the future. The following are ways to build relationships with students:

- Try to make visits to all classrooms
- Sometimes, with the teacher's agreement, it's good to simply observe a class
- Be mindful of the scheduled times slotted for your visits
- Find out where students are in the Religion curriculum
- Engage with students about the Religion curriculum
- Invite any questions they might have
- Reminisce about when you were young and in school
- Invite students into sacramental preparation
- Invite classes to make an excursion to the church
- Promote the opportunity to become altar servers
- Promote involvement in youth programs at your parish
- Offer to accompany a class field trip
- Ask to be included in school spirit days
- Facilitate opportunities for high school students to serve mandatory volunteer hours
- Attend school sporting events
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: ENGAGE IN SCHOOL-WIDE EVENTS

It is the expectation of the Archbishop of Toronto that pastors or their associate pastors will celebrate Mass for the students in Catholic schools and will also provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation. School-wide liturgical events are an important time in the life of a school community. The school's identity as a Catholic community, united in Christ, is expressed and experienced by all members of the school. Through liturgical celebrations, you are building the relationship of every school member with Christ. The following are suggestions for nurturing those relationships:

- Celebrate school-wide Masses whenever possible in the church
- Problem-solve about transportation, bussing to the church
- Have meetings prior to Masses to plan and discuss expectations
- Let school staff deal with behaviour concerns
- Consider the projection of responses and the lyrics to hymns
- Make sure homilies are age-appropriate, *brief* and engages the imagination (e.g., stories, saints)
- If Mass is to be celebrated in a gymnasium, be clear about your expectations based on the archdiocesan *Requisites for the Celebration of Mass Outside of a Sacred Space*
- Consider having Masses for smaller groups (e.g., divisional Masses)
- Be available for the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday
- Make yourself available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent
- Be mindful that you are also always ministering to the adults in the community
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: ENGAGE THE STAFF

Teachers are your allies. View them as your collaborators. Your presence in the school is a gift to the adults in the building as well as to the children. *While there may be some staff members who are not practicing their faith or who are living in irregular relationships, their perceived coolness towards you may be more a result of spiritual insecurity rather than intentional expression of disrespect or hostility.* Resist taking things personally. Your presence in the school may go a long way to encourage those faithful teachers who are striving to make the school a truly Catholic community. The following are suggestions to build those relationships:

- As mentioned above, be mindful of the scheduled times slotted for your classroom visits
- Try to attend and address a staff meeting early in the school year
- Publicly acknowledge and thank teachers who support sacramental preparation
- Arrange a visit to the staff room for coffee during recess/lunch (bring treats/doughnuts)
- Let teachers know they can contact you about any spiritual issue
- Offer to assist with PA days of reflection
- Offer to celebrate Mass for the staff (even if not everyone shows up)
- Offer hospitality (e.g., to host a BBQ for staff at the end of the school year)
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: **ENGAGE THE PARENTS**

School parents, as first educators, have deliberately chosen to entrust their child to a Catholic school. While for some, the decision to choose a Catholic school may entail other factors, faithful parents trust that the school will help form their child in the faith and that the school will be a place where their child will encounter Christ. Knowing that a priest is involved in some way with the school is immensely reassuring for parents. Some parents have been evangelized by their own children's experience at school. The opportunity to engage with parents is an opportunity to evangelize, to re-evangelize and to connect parents with parishes. The following are suggestions to foster those relationships:

- Attend and be introduced at Curriculum Night in September
- Ask for the opportunity to address the parents at Curriculum Night
- Attend (or send a delegate) all parent council meetings
- Get to know the chair of the parent council
- Attend school events involving families – concerts, graduations, pot-luck dinners, BBQs
- Provide a letter of invitation to the school office to include in packages for new registrants
- Show up at the Welcome to Kindergarten event
- If there is a school newsletter, ask for a parish news column
- Facilitate the connection between needy families and your St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Invite parents to come to Mass on Sunday
- Be a model of joy!



WAYS FOR PASTORS TO ENGAGE THE SCHOOL: ENGAGE YOUR PARISHIONERS

The pastor plays an important role in Catholic education by keeping all parishioners informed about what's happening in your local Catholic school. Children are the future of the church and of your parish in particular. Everyone, not just parents or grandparents, has an interest in supporting good Catholic education. The following are some suggestions to help build the relationship between all of your parishioners and the school:

- Reference the school in the parish bulletin
- Mention your visits to the school, include examples from school visits in your homily
- Bring to light the good things that are happening in the school
- Include the school in your petitions
- Ask your parishioners to pray for the school, its teachers and students
- Offer the school an opportunity to make announcements after Mass (e.g., BBQs, concerts, etc.)
- Promote kindergarten registration
- Help the school observe Catholic Education Week in May
- Support families and youth with parish-based programs
- Have a school representative position on your parish council
- Get to know those parishioners who are teachers
- Remind parishioners of their responsibility to vote wisely for school trustees
- Help connect parishioners who would like to volunteer in schools

FURTHER RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES

- 2018 – *Renewing the Promise: A Pastoral Letter for Catholic Education*
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
- 2015 – *Norms Concerning the Relationship Between Our Parishes and Our Catholic School*
Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto
- 2015 – *Requisites for the Celebration of Mass Outside of a Sacred Space*
Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto
- 2013 – *Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Toronto*
- 2013 – *Bridge Builders (Relationship Between the Parish and the School)*
Ontario Catholic Schools Trustee’s Association
- 1988 – *Building Bridges Between The School and Parish*
Catholic High School Commission, Archdiocese of Toronto

VATICAN DOCUMENTS

- 2007 – *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 2005 – *Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 2003 – *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 1997 – *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the New Millennium*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 1990 – *In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 1977 – *The Catholic School*
Congregation for Catholic Education
- 1967 – *Statement on Catholic Schools*
Congregation for Catholic Education

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