

Schools to believe in!

# Notebook

Volume four, Issue five  
June 2009

## Catholic Education Week celebrates Schools To Believe In

We danced, we sang, we prayed and we celebrated. Renfrew County's Catholic community engaged in a variety of special reflections and events to mark Catholic Education Week this spring.

The activities ranged from dedicated prayers each day, to celebrations of school Mass at parish churches, to family fun nights and even a science demonstration.

The theme for this year, which is marked by the Catholic Church as the Year of St. Paul, was "Good News For All".

Tony Cosentino, Catholic Education Week committee chair for the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, explained that the theme reflects the board's mission as expressed in its Vision Statement: "...we are called... to pass on the good news of Jesus Christ."

"We welcomed this year's Catholic Education Week as an opportunity for the entire Catholic community to celebrate our schools and their role in the Church's mission to spread the Good News," says Cosentino, the school board's Religious Education and Family Life Resource Teacher.

Each day of the week was marked with a special sub-theme: Monday focused on "Embracing Hope", Tuesday "Celebrating

With Joy", Wednesday "Building Community", Thursday "Growing in Integrity" and Friday "Living With Gratitude." Across the county, Catholic school students highlighted those messages through daily prayers, theme-based lessons and special activities.

"Catholic Education Week is an opportunity for the entire Catholic community to celebrate the distinctive character and mission of our Catholic schools," comments Michele Arbour, Director of Education for the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board. "It reminds everyone—parents, grandparents, teachers, staff, members of our Catholic parishes and members of the broader community—that we live our Christian values on a daily basis in our schools."

"Really, for us, every week is Catholic Education Week," she concludes.



As part of Catholic Education Week, the entire student body of St. Joseph's Catholic High School traveled from Renfrew to join with students from St. Joseph's Catholic School and John XXIII Catholic School of Arnprior to celebrate Mass at St. John Chrysostom Catholic Church, where Father Pat Dobec encouraged all of the participants to "reach for the top" in their relationship with God. Father Dobec, left, shares a moment with RCCDSB Superintendent of Education Jaimie Perry.

## A message from the Director of Education

At this busy time of year, I know that many people are looking forward to a bit of a reprieve and the chance to refresh and reflect.

I must admit, however, that I often find myself reluctantly heading toward the end of the school year. It is such an exciting time. Our students are awl in special celebrations, formals and exam preparations. They are competing in regional athletics events and enjoying annual school trips. Their teachers are bringing their lessons to a natural conclusion, pulling all of those strands together to complete the stories and lessons they have been weaving for the past 10 months.

Together, we are celebrating in so many different ways. New levels of accomplishment, unique achievements, those moments of discovery... these are what education is all about.

In the few precious days remaining in this school year, I invite you to take a few minutes to reflect on the accomplishments we are sharing through this final edition of *Notebook* for the 2008–2009 school year. This is just a small sample of the many good things that are happening in our “*Schools To Believe In!*”

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a restful and enjoyable summer. To those staff and students who are moving on to other opportunities, please know that our prayers and good wishes go with you. To those who will be returning next fall, I look forward to another year full of unknown opportunities and new chances to succeed!

**Best regards,**  
**Michele Arbour**  
**Director of Education**

## Board’s leadership team takes time to reflect on Catholicism

In a busy world filled with teaching and administrative responsibilities, it can be difficult to slow down and take the time to develop your own spirituality.

Renfrew County’s Catholic principals were given that opportunity as part of a special faith formation program that ran throughout this school year. Five times during the year, they joined in active discussions led by Father Ryan Holly, who guided them in explorations of the church, the liturgy, the scripture, the eucharist and the vocation and call of the laity.

“Our conversations and discussions were lively and informative,” says St. James Catholic School Principal Elizabeth Burchat. “It was fascinating.”

She explains that the session on the church focused on where Catholicism fits in with Christianity and other religions. The session on the liturgy reviewed the structure of the church

service, how it unites Catholics worldwide, and where liturgical leaders have freedom to put their own interpretation on that structure.

As a school administrator, Burchat says she was particularly inspired by the discussions about the Catholic vocation.

“When we pray for vocations such as the priesthood, we are also praying for the leadership within our Catholic congregations—the teachers, principals and others who step forward through different callings.”

Burchat admits that it would be difficult to find the time to continue such faith formation sessions at the board leadership level, but says the one-year experience will spread through the Catholic education system in different ways.

“The dialogue will continue with staff within our schools,” she predicts.

## Big things are happening for small schools in the RCCDSB

The St. Casimir Catholic School’s teaching staff have successfully developed a program to share expertise among small, rural schools in the upcoming school year.

The Ministry of Education has accepted their proposal to establish a professional learning community and will provide funding over the course of the 2009–2010 school year for a teacher-driven leadership outreach. Teachers from the school have already attended a two-day training session in Toronto with more than 200 other teachers from across the province.

“This project will allow us to do something about a teacher’s worst enemy in implementing any idea—time,” comments Alaina Jenkins, one of the teachers involved in the project.

“Time will be set aside to network with our own staff, other teachers in our board and teachers across the province, since we are required to publish our results, insights and findings,” she explains.

The teachers have identified two main goals for the project. The opportunity will provide them with time to discuss and share how a professional learning community can best work in a small school.

“As teachers, we will review our teaching, planning and assessment practices on a regular basis in order to optimize student achievement and learning in multi-grade classrooms,” Jenkins explains.

They will then apply what they learn by developing a “Small Schools Resource Bank” to share and circulate teaching resources in literacy, numeracy, science and social studies.

“This bank will allow the smaller rural schools to share,” Jenkins says, noting that with multi-grade classrooms different teachers can schedule their curriculum topics to make full use of the materials that might otherwise be sitting idle.

“Simply, small schools can band together and make strategic purchases as a group,” Jenkins concludes. “It’s another great team approach that will benefit our classrooms and our students.”



St. Casimir teachers had the opportunity to meet recently with Ann Lieberman, second from left, who is well known across North America for her work in the area of teacher leadership and development. With her are, from left, David Afelskie, Wendy Klawitter and Alaina Jenkins.

## Practising science at a national level

When Rebecca Sandrelli begins to speak about her science fair project, it's easy to forget that she's a grade 9 student.

Data about daphnia magna (microscopic organisms that live in the Ottawa River), fecundity and mortality rates roll off her



Rebecca Sandrelli has taken her scientific curiosity to the national level.

tongue as she describes her findings on the adverse effects of pharmaceuticals on aquatic ecosystems.

It quickly becomes clear that Rebecca is exercising patience as she puts her studies into layman's terms.

It is also abundantly clear that she earned the gold and bronze medals she received at the Canada-Wide Science Fair this spring.

Rebecca came home from the Winnipeg event with

the gold prize for intermediate life sciences and the bronze award for environmental innovation.

This is her fourth year as a science fair participant and her second advance to the national level of competition.

This year, she studied the heart rate, fecundity (which is the ability to produce offspring), and mortality (death rate) of daphnia magna when exposed to caffeine and other medication solutions. Mortality rates reached 100 per cent within a month for all of the solutions she used.

Rebecca says the next natural question is, given the effects on microscopic organisms, what effect are these solutions having on us?

The question is beyond the reach of a typical science fair presentation, so Rebecca is already exploring new topics for next year's competitions.

She's also thinking about where her natural interest in science will take her in life. At present, the two leading options are a career in either pediatric oncology or pediatric cardiology.

She'll take her time through the rest of her high school years to think about whether she would prefer to practice hands-on medicine or concentrate on medical research.

In the meantime, Rebecca enjoys the opportunity to explore various aspects of science.

"I'm just very curious," she says. "I like to find out how things work, and I like to find solutions that will make a difference."

## Catholic high schools extend their reach to the top



Teams from Bishop Smith Catholic High School in Pembroke, above, and St. Joseph's High School in Renfrew dominated the regional Reach for the Top competitions this year.

*Photo by Student Chad Godin.*

## Going to school the healthy way

St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Renfrew was recognized this spring as one of the healthiest schools in the province.

A team of staff, students and volunteers has worked especially hard to develop three arms to St. Joe's ambitious focus on health.

### The food of life

The school administration has ensured that the cafeteria follows the Eat Smart cafeteria program established by the Ministry of Health Promotion Initiatives. In addition to their regular healthy menu, St. Joe's has made Wednesdays "fryless" to reduce the consumption of fatty foods.

### The active habit

Students have an opportunity to be physically active in the gym during lunch hour. With teacher supervision, the gym and equipment are available for all interested students to find their favourite activity and let off some steam. Popularity has grown since the program was introduced, with staff and students regularly enjoying some friendly competition or stress-reduction.

### The jaguar model

The school's athletic department raised more than \$6,000 to equip St. Joseph's newly-renovated conditioning centre, which now features both universal and free weights. The room is regularly supervised to allow students to work out, and all students are offered a training program to make sure they are engaging in healthy fitness routines.

## Our Mission Statement

Inspired by our rich heritage and challenged by the struggles of our past, we are an inclusive Catholic educational community called to express our mission as Church to pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ, to make it relevant in the world today, and to be the hope for the future.

## Nine-year-old Lourdes student is a published author

Alina Gdaniec knows how to weave a story.

When she began to prepare her speech this year, she knew she would be focusing on some sort of interesting wildlife. She also knew that she wanted to inspire her grade 3 and 4 classmates to take action and make a difference in the world.

Alina's research led her to tree kangaroos, an endangered species on the other side of the world.

"I am going to take you on a journey deep through the jungles of Australia, through the dense forests and up, up, up to the canopy of this habitat," she began.



Alina Gdaniec shares her published story on tree kangaroos with Teacher Mary Mercer.

"But who will we encounter way up there? Who or what will we meet way up high in the jungle trees?"

Alina's classmates were hooked. They anxiously listened as her speech continued, and they were open to her concluding suggestions that they could help tree kangaroos and other endangered species by giving donations or organizing fund-raisers.

Her classmates were not alone. Their teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Pembroke, Mary Mercer, was equally impressed, and suggested that Alina's speech could be submitted to the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association young authors recognition program.

"From the get-go, I could see that she had a brilliant sense of her own individual voice," says Mercer, who has been leading her class through the "Write Traits" writing program throughout the school year.

Alina has a natural love for the writing process.

"I try to picture the scene in my mind while I'm writing," she says, adding that she also enjoys re-reading and editing her stories.

Her enthusiasm for the written word reached new peaks earlier this spring, when she learned that her story would be one of the submissions published in the provincial teacher association's commemorative book.

"I wasn't allowed to tell anyone until June," Alina says, clearly recalling her excitement and the frustration of keeping such a big secret.

Finally, she was able to share the good news with her classmates.

"We all celebrate each other's success," says Mercer. "Each person in a classroom has their own talent, and there is a lot of joy in recognizing that and encouraging each other."

For Alina, the encouragement is just one more indication that she is following a natural path to her future.

"I want to be an author," she says simply.

At 9, she can celebrate the fact that she already is.

## Pembroke principal receives provincial award for school and community leadership

Alfie Sicoli, principal of Cathedral Catholic School in Pembroke, has been honoured by his peers throughout Ontario as a Principal of the Year. The award was presented at the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario annual meeting on May 1.



"We are delighted to have one of our own receiving such a prestigious honour," comments Renfrew County Catholic District School Board Chair Andrew Bray.

"Alfie Sicoli exemplifies servant leadership and he continues to make

Renfrew County Catholic a board to 'Believe In!'," Mr. Bray concludes. "Throughout his career, he has brought our board's vision statement to life, sustaining 'safe school environments characterized by warmth, hospitality, good humour and joy!'"

Mr. Sicoli's career spans 39 years in Catholic education, including 27 years as a principal.

Mr. Sicoli says the nomination for this award is especially meaningful because it came from his peers, the Catholic school principals of Renfrew County.

"Every one of the principals and administrators I've worked with could be nominated for Principal of the Year in different areas," he states. "I feel truly blessed for the directors, supervisory officers, co-ordinators, special assignment teachers and the many principals and vice-principals who have shared my 27-year journey as a principal."

"I'm very humbled to receive this," he concludes.