

DECEMBER 2024 ISSUE

ONLINE
VERSION

Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

MESSAGES OF HOPE AND INSPIRATION

**A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE
FROM FRANK CARDINAL LEO**

**LEARNING FROM DIVERSE
TEACHER VOICES**

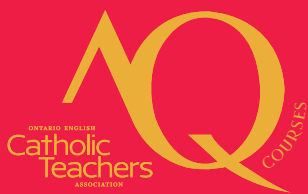
**REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2024
CTF WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM**

**#KIDSPLAINED – THE LATEST
PHASE OF THE KNOW MORE
CAMPAIGN**

PLUS:

Exploring the Galapagos Islands
Transforming sustainable classrooms with Resources for Rethinking
Mental hygiene to support your mental health and wellness





**learn
teach
succeed.**

An illustration of two people embracing. The person on the left is wearing a yellow top and a green scarf. The person on the right has dark curly hair, is wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, and has their right arm raised towards the text box.

**Take an AQ
Course with
OECTA and
find out why we
have a **94%**
approval rating
from more than
4,000 teachers!**

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TO LEARN MORE**



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



While it has been a short time since our last edition of *Catholic Teacher* magazine, a lot has changed in the world, especially following the results of the U.S. election. I recognize that we have all been overwhelmed with political grief, and the immense toll it has taken on women and equity-deserving individuals amidst the terrifying erosion of human rights, bodily autonomy, and democracy.

U.S. politics are world politics, and what happens on the American stage impacts all of us. We must be cognizant that what is happening in the U.S. is not an isolated incident. Populist and far-right politics have had momentum all over the world, including here in Canada. We cannot separate what happened south of the border from the future potential outcome of our upcoming provincial and federal elections in Ontario and Canada. We must maintain a sense of hope and belief that the future can be better; that teachers, our members, can find the resolve and determination to fight for a better future. We must keep fighting for our rights as Canadians and as Ontarians, as teachers and as advocates – for ourselves, our students, and our communities.

As teachers, we understand firsthand the impact that Doug Ford and the Conservative Party of Ontario have had on our publicly funded education systems, from underfunding our schools to devaluing our profession. In Ontario, the Ford government continues its ideologically-driven move toward a privatized model of greed and profit rather than prioritizing people and the public good.

The political unfolding in the U.S. is a clear message that our work is cut out for us if we are going to elect a government that believes in the common good, a government that believes in investing in its public services and the people they serve. The election of a government partner is the first step in our next round of bargaining, and we must do whatever we can to mobilize in this direction.

The Association, with the support of the Provincial Executive, is committing time and resources to build the strategic work needed to support you in the fight for the concerns and aspirations that you continue to share. Together, we can rise to that fight. This is part of who we are, our proud history, and our success as members of OECTA.

In addition to our election-readiness efforts, there is a lot to look forward to across the many facets of our Association. With the 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the horizon, there is an exciting opportunity for members to share their voice through the democratic processes of our Association, especially as we continue to benefit from the many talents and contributions of our members. This includes our accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity efforts, which seek to reflect the needs and experiences of our diverse membership.

Catholic Teacher

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At AGM 2025, delegates will also participate in elections for members of the Provincial Executive and Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) Governors. All positions are up for election this year, each for a two-year term. Individuals interested in putting their name forward for election, must do so by 11:59 p.m. EST on January 15.

Work is now underway for the upcoming Teachers as Leaders Conference, which will take place from April 3 to 4. The conference theme, "Be the Change," reflects the urgency of democratic engagement as teacher leaders, union members, and global citizens. This is part of our call to action to foster collective change, recognizing that we must all do our part as individuals to create positive change in our schools, our communities, and our province. We are heartened and motivated by the feedback we continue to receive regarding our professional development offerings.

I look forward to meeting with many of you at one of our upcoming events. In the meantime, with the Christmas season upon us, it is my hope that we can embrace the opportunity to pause and find ways to reflect on our common commitment to education and the tireless work that we achieve on behalf of our students and our fellow members. This is a natural expression of our faith and our activism as Catholic teachers and social justice advocates.

I wish you peace, joy, hope, and rest this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas,



René Jansen in de Wal
President

ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

We want to hear from you

If you would like to connect with us to share your thoughts, ideas, or concerns, please reach out to us at: publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca.

There is no voice more important than a member's voice.

Cover: OECTA Provincial Office
Christmas Card, 2024.

CALENDAR

DECEMBER

- 16 Registration Opens for Spring AQ Courses
- 18 International Migrants Day

CHRISTMAS BREAK

Provincial Office Closure

December 23 to January 3



JANUARY 2025

- 3 Registration Closes for Winter Mini Courses
- 6 Epiphany
- 21 Lincoln Alexander Day
- 24 International Day of Education
- 27 Family Literacy Day
- 27 International Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust
- 29 Lunar New Year

FEBRUARY 2025

Black History Month

- 3 Spring AQ Courses Begin
- 10 School Deadline for Young Authors Awards (Class Entries to OECTA Staff Representatives)
- 17 Family Day
- 20 World Day of Social Justice
- 21 Unit Deadline for Young Authors Awards (School Entries to Local OECTA Unit)
- 22 National Human Trafficking Awareness Day
- 26 Pink Shirt Day

UP FRONT

Join Canada's Teen Fact-Checking Network

Do you know any media-savvy teens looking to make a difference online? Encourage them to join Canada's Teen Fact-Checking Network today!

Teens aged 13 to 18 who are interested in fact-checking popular posts appearing on their social media feeds will create fact-checking videos for the MediaSmarts' YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok channels. Check out some examples [here](#) and [here!](#)

Selected teens will have the opportunity to learn from and work with digital media literacy and communications experts. They will receive an honorarium and a certificate upon completing the project. [Registration is open now until December 15.](#)

Hey Catholic teachers!

Have you published a book?

Send us your work for a chance to be featured in our magazine!

Email us at: publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca



We're looking to amplify Black voices in the February issue of *Catholic Teacher* magazine!

WE ARE LOOKING FOR:

- Artists to feature their art in the magazine.
- Authors to platform their published work.
- Activists to educate Catholic teachers across the province.
- Teachers to share their classroom goals.
- Local leaders to share the beauty of their community.
- And More!

Nominate an outstanding teacher for the 2025 Prime Minister's Teaching Awards!

Do you know an extraordinary teacher making a difference in the lives of students? Celebrate their innovation, dedication, and impact by nominating them for the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence!

These prestigious awards honour exceptional teachers across Canada who inspire creativity, foster innovation, and prepare students for a brighter future. Whether it is groundbreaking STEM lessons or nurturing critical thinking in the classroom, this is your chance to recognize their excellence.

Deadline for nominations: January 15.

Visit the [Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence website](#) for nomination forms and details.

Celebrate teaching excellence with the OTIP Teaching Awards!

Great teachers shape minds, inspire dreams, and leave a lasting impact on their students and communities. The OTIP Teaching Awards recognize teachers who go above and beyond, fostering creativity, innovation, and a love for learning. If you have seen the difference a teacher has made – whether through their dedication to student success, innovative teaching strategies, or commitment to inclusivity – this is your chance to ensure they receive the recognition they deserve. **Nominations open January 20!**

Nominate a teacher who embodies the spirit of excellence. **Visit OTIP Teaching Awards** for more details and to submit your nomination. Let us honour the teachers who change lives!



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

- Best Practices in Member Engagement
- Innovation in Engaging Indigenous and Equity-deserving Members
- Outstanding Promotion of Catholic Teachers and the Value of Catholic Education

Click **HERE** to learn more and nominate.

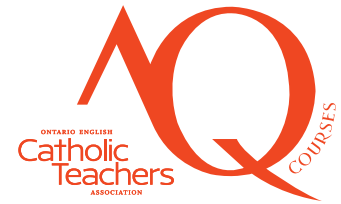
ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic Teachers
ASSOCIATION

Assumption University is back!

Assumption University, one of Canada's oldest Catholic institutions, is now offering a **Graduate Diploma in Catholic Studies**, a program that is recognized as a hiring asset by eight Catholic school boards across the province. Designed for those looking to deepen their understanding of Catholicism while enhancing their career prospects, the program features five graduate-level courses delivered online, making it both flexible and accessible. Plus, students can transfer credits towards advanced degrees like an M.Ed. at the University of Windsor, an M.A. at the University of Detroit Mercy, or M.Div. and M.T.S. degrees at St. Peter's Seminary.

Assumption University is also introducing an exciting new course called **Catholicism Around the Globe**, which begins on January 9. This thought-provoking class explores the diverse ways Catholicism is practiced in regions such as Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and more. Other courses in the program include, Catholicism and Social Justice, Catholicism and Dialogue, and Capstone in Catholic Studies. To promote accessibility, there are no international fees at Assumption University.

Whether you are looking to advance your career, deepen your faith, or simply explore Catholicism from a fresh, global perspective, this program is your gateway. Visit the **Assumption University** website or email registrar@assumptionu.ca to learn more and take the first step toward this transformative academic journey!



BE THE CHANGE

Discover OECTA's transformative new AQ Course, **Addressing Anti-Black Racism to Change Pedagogy and Practice, Part 1**. This course gives teachers the knowledge and tools to actively unpack anti-Black racism in educational settings.

Participants will:

- Explore the historical and contemporary contexts of anti-Black racism.
- Examine the impact of anti-Black racism on students.
- Learn actionable strategies to create inclusive and equitable learning environments for all.

Through engaging modules and practical activities, teachers will develop the skills to critically reflect on their own practices and implement meaningful change in their classrooms. This course not only enhances teaching approaches, but also deepens understanding and commitment to social justice and equity.

Don't miss your chance to join this important learning journey.

Registration opens December 16.
Registration closes February 3.

Events

/ Election readiness training: powering change together!



This fall, in anticipation of a possible snap provincial election – most likely to be called for winter or spring 2025 – the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at Provincial Office organized a two-day, election-focused training event. The goal of the training was to equip the Association’s activists with resources, ideas, and strategies to bring back to their units, and support all Catholic teachers as we work toward electing progressive candidates and an education-friendly government.

Under the theme of “Powering Change Together,” the training built on work started earlier this year to organize and mobilize. It focused on strengthening our local Political Action Committees (PACs) and building upon our collective power as Catholic teachers and as an Association.

Sessions at the training provided participants with a foundation to energize Catholic teachers and our education communities, the resources to harness the power of our stories as teachers, a history of the Ford government’s cuts, and ways to collect ideas and data to enhance our campaigns and activate members and supporters.



The program also featured a rousing speech by President René Jansen in de Wal and a presentation from the newly-formed GTA regional group, Political Action Catholic Teachers (pACT).

The keynote address on movement building, uplifting, and empowering equity-deserving communities, was delivered by LaToia A. Jones, an accomplished U.S. political strategist and organizer.

This is only the beginning. With the likelihood of a snap provincial election growing, the Association is expanding our work with local leaders, activists, and all Catholic teachers, so we are ready to champion the best for our schools and the students we serve – and **power change together!**

Visit our **Political and Community Activism** webpage in the Members’ Areas at **catholicteachers.ca** for more information and resources.



A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

May Jesus and Mary be in your souls.

I pray that this Advent season is filled with joy, prayer, and hopeful anticipation as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. I offer my appreciation to Ontario's English Catholic Teachers for the high level of care and education that you offer students in publicly funded Catholic schools throughout the province.

It is fitting that during Advent we be animated by eager expectation for the arrival of the child Jesus in the manger of our hearts. While there are countless distractions in life today that can detract from the true meaning of Christmas, we need look no further than the simple manger to refocus our attention.

The simplicity of the Christmas story, the coming of our Saviour, born in a small and humble stable, acts as a reminder for us all to take pause and slow down in order to prioritize what is truly important for us during this season of wonder and joy. Let us make every effort to find opportunities to touch the hearts of those around us, following the example of Christ to love and care for others. Our mere, but authentic, presence can serve as great comfort for those who are alone and struggling.

Christ remains our eternal teacher who accompanies us along our earthly path. Just as you are entrusted with the responsibility of walking alongside the students, so too is our Lord with us through the joys and struggles that we experience in life's journey.

I know that the challenges are significant in balancing the many demands on your time. Be assured of my appreciation and gratitude for all that you do to inspire, educate, and model the expectations of the Catholic graduate each day in our schools. How incredibly paramount it is to live the Catholic faith, fully and generously, in communion with all persons and with fidelity to Church teaching and a life of service.

Know that you, your families, and all the students entrusted to your care will be close to my heart this Christmas. I continue to pray for all teachers, that you may continue to be a source of faith, wisdom, and prudence, bringing the light of Christ to all those you encounter each day.

Thank you once again for all that you do. Merry Christmas!

Yours Sincerely in Jesus with Mary,



† Frank Card. Leo

FRANK CARDINAL LEO
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto



#KIDSPLAINED

KIDS TAKE ONTARIANS TO SCHOOL IN THE LATEST PHASE OF THE KNOW MORE CAMPAIGN

BY STEPHEN MICHALOWICZ

The **Know More campaign** continues to be a trusted brand and a powerful voice for change – not only for Catholic teachers, but also for the students and families we serve.

With a snap provincial election on the horizon, the Association has launched **#Kidsplained**, the newest phase of our **Know More** campaign, to emphasize the urgent need for real investments in our schools – for the benefit of all Ontarians.



Campaign billboards are amplifying our message to Ontarians across the province in key locations and regions, including a billboard on the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto and one right outside Minister of Education Jill Dunlop's constituency office in Orillia.

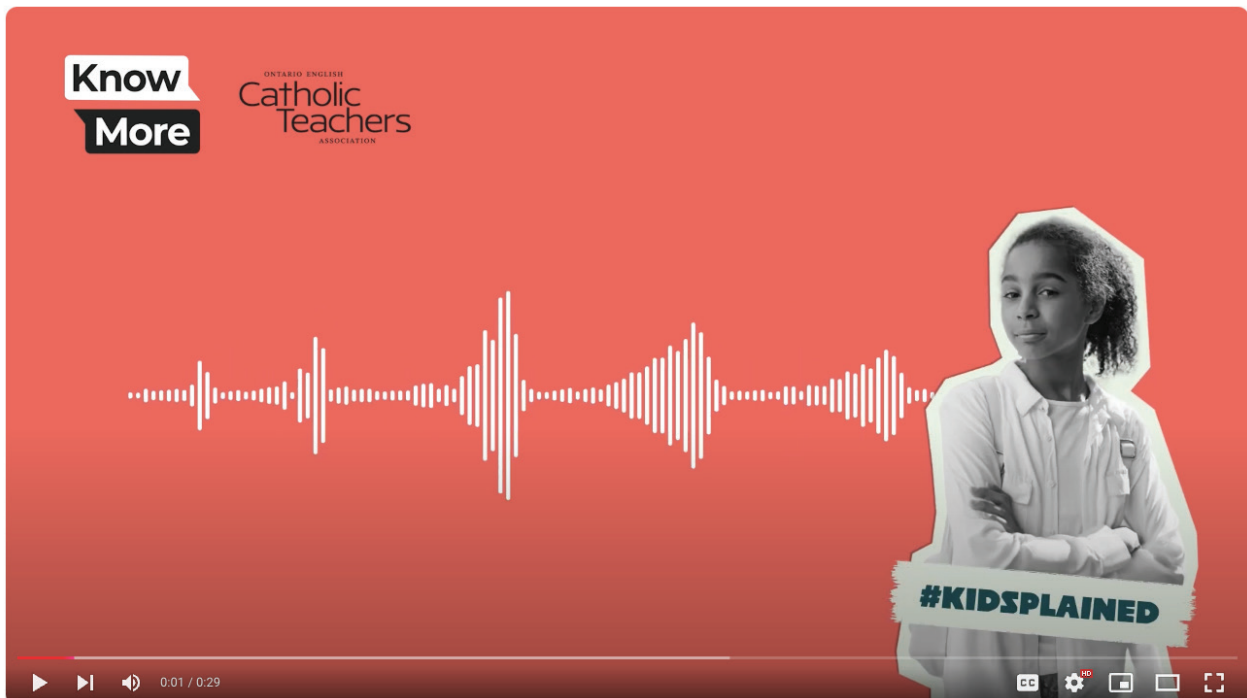


The Association is currently running animated ads on a variety of social media and web platforms, including this ad which highlights that Doug Ford has cut more than 3,500 classroom teaching positions since coming to office.

Since its launch in 2019, the **Know More** campaign has provided a platform for the Association to amplify the voices of Catholic teachers, students, parents, other educators, and communities across Ontario. Through the campaign, we are highlighting the Ford Conservative government's severe underfunding of our schools, promoting understanding about the critical issues facing teachers and students, and offering opportunities for supporters to engage in advocacy efforts.

As a potential snap provincial election looms, Catholic teachers have an opportunity to make a real impact – to raise awareness about the Ford Conservative government's funding cuts, inspire voters to elect an education-friendly government, and effect real, positive change for all Ontarians at Queen's Park.

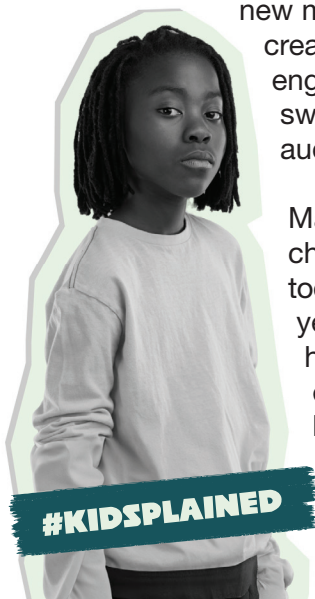




The Association is running radio ads on Spotify, during podcasts, and in retail stores across the province, highlighting Doug Ford’s wrongheaded priorities and refusal to invest in schools.

Building on the success of previous efforts, and in response to feedback from you, as Catholic teachers, the Association recently launched the **#Kidsplained** phase, with new messaging and compelling creative designed to reach and engage parents, grandparents, swayable voters, and other key audiences across the province.

Many parents feel their children face more challenges today than they did themselves, yet often feel powerless to help. Our new campaign empowers them to become **Know More** supporters and advocate for real



government investment in schools – an essential step in their children’s success.

To make our message impactful, we are giving the microphone to students, so they can become the broadcasters. In our new **#Kidsplained** campaign, kids “take Ontarians to school” to help adults “Know More” about the pressing issues facing teachers and students, and encourage them to take action.

Through student voices and compelling statistics, the Association is highlighting the Ford Conservative government’s misplaced priorities and championing Catholic teachers’ vision for a well-funded, world-class publicly funded education system.

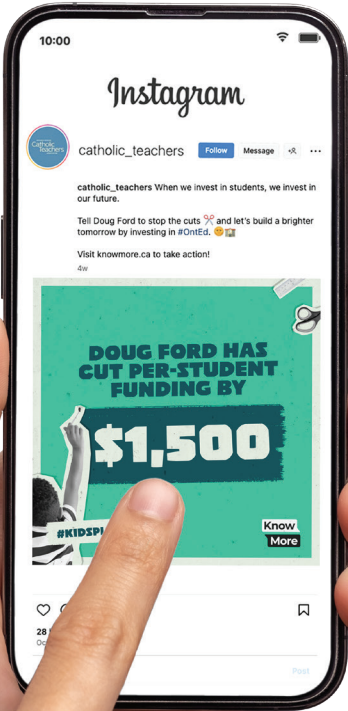
This latest phase of the campaign reaches across the province, from Windsor to Cornwall to Thunder Bay, through billboards, video, radio, podcasts, social media, digital display advertising (bus shelters, malls, community centres, etc.) and more – focusing on the regions and key audiences that will shape the outcome of the next provincial election.

In the coming months, the Association will continue to scale up and evolve the **#Kidsplained** campaign to ensure our message resonates – and that we are countering the Ford Conservative government’s misleading narratives, highlighting Doug Ford’s cuts to education, and empowering our communities to advocate for the investments teachers and students need.

Together, as Catholic teachers mobilize for an election, our **Know More** campaign will continue to grow, inspiring all Ontarians to make a change for the better by electing an education-friendly government.

Stay tuned for more exciting updates as more Ontarians join us in the fight for real, meaningful investments in our schools. Visit [KnowMore.ca](https://www.knowmore.ca) and **join the campaign** – let’s make every voice count for the future of publicly funded education.

Stephen Michalowicz is a Communications Specialist in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.



Through social media ads directed toward key regions and audiences across the province, the Association is raising awareness of the fact that per-student funding has been cut by \$1,500 since Doug Ford took office – that means \$3 billion less for schools.





LEARNING FROM DIVERSE VOICES

**Catholic
teachers
share their
experiences**

BY YVONNE RUNSTEDLER

I have been blessed to be involved in many meaningful projects in my career as a teacher. When I taught a class called Equity and Social Justice at the secondary level, the final project involved TEDx-style talks in our theatre arts auditorium where students shared a piece of their lived experience alongside research about similar issues, all in front of their peers. In my doctoral studies, I interviewed transgender graduates of Catholic schools about their lived experiences, relationships with the Church, and the complicated ways each one desired belonging and a sense of home in a spiritual community.

Now, as a Staff Officer at Provincial Office, I was given the opportunity to lead the curation of the Learning from Diverse Voices video series, which features the professional, academic, and lived-experience knowledge of equity-deserving OECTA members.

It is important to note that every one of these meaningful projects included a team of excellent collaborators. Whether it was the students themselves for the TEDx talks and a certain drama teacher who taught me how to teach performance, the research participants and my doctoral research committee, or the many colleagues and OECTA members who gave up their weekends through May and June to come to Toronto for the interviews, which eventually comprised the content of the video series.

When we put a call out for participants in April, we asked potential collaborators to reflect on the following questions:

- What would I like all teachers to know about teaching students with my shared identity? (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; Black; racialized; 2SLGBTQIA+; and/or students with disabilities)
- Where do I find joy in my profession? In my life?
- What does intersectionality mean to me?
- What does good allyship look like? Sound like? Feel like?

We were hoping for approximately 20 members to participate in this video series, but were blown away when we received 50 video applications from Catholic teachers from across the province. The submissions were so excellent that we decided to expand our project mandate, so that all those who put their name forward could participate in some way.

While sitting across from each member during their filmed interviews, hearing their insights as they answered each question, it became clear to me and my colleagues, Eden Debebe and Michelle Despault, that the seven curated videos we had initially proposed would not be enough to adequately feature the stories and knowledge shared. So, once again, we expanded our mandate. In the end, we curated 25 videos, 11 focused on a variety of equity-related topics, and 14 member spotlights focused on individual members sharing their own story.

To help Catholic teachers and Association leaders use these videos to their full potential, we also created **resource maps**. Vetted by participants in the video series, they feature hyperlinks to each video, the running time, topics introduced, reflection questions, and additional resources for continued learning. All of these resources can be found in the AIDE section of the **Members' Area at catholicteachers.ca**.

What is allyship?



Reflection questions:

- Read the document, “**Catholic Teachers’ Safer Spaces Series: Allyship and Beyond**.” How are you an ally, accomplice, and co-conspirator? Use the reflection guide to help you consider this.
- What is your definition of allyship?

Access the **Resource Map** for more questions and connections on this topic.

Where do you find joy as a teacher?



There is so much I would love to share about this venture. In the planning, consideration, and implementation of this project, it was our strong desire that each person be dignified by the process. At each stage, we attempted to have an equity focus. This included vetting studios and production teams that aligned with accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity; hiring a Trans graduate of the Catholic system as an editor; and expanding the project to ensure that more nuance and diverse voices were centered, even while speaking on the same topic.

It is not lost on me, Michelle, Eden, or the other staff who supported this work, that each participant shares their journey at personal risk. As one participant said recently at a viewing party at Fall Council of Presidents, “These are real people with real lives and real stories.” I sat in the chair across from each person and was gifted with so much new learning, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, but always engaged, understanding the importance of the intent behind this project.

Reflection questions:

- Where do you find joy as a teacher? How has this changed since you began in the profession?
- How do you facilitate the joy of your students?
- How do you connect with your students?

Access the [Resource Map](#) for more questions and connections on this topic.

Now that the [Learning from Diverse Voices Video Series](#) is released, I would like to call all OECTA leaders and members into this shared responsibility. We have been collectively gifted with the courage, humour, humility, and knowledge of the participants in this project. I consider it an honour to continue to share these videos the best way I can – and I hope everyone reading this does too.

“These are real people with real lives and real stories.”

Yvonne Runstedler is a Staff Officer in the Administration department at OECTA Provincial Office, with an AIDE-focused assignment.



teachersasleaders

CONFERENCE

BE THE CHANGE!

APRIL
3 TO 4

Calling all Catholic teachers who are looking to learn more about OECTA and enhance their leadership skills to attend the 2025 Teachers as Leaders Conference.

Do not miss this exciting opportunity to reach out, be inspired, learn in a supportive community, and be empowered.

Click **HERE** to learn more and apply.



Unite, Inspire, Uplift!

Reflections from the 2024 CTF Women's Symposium



Left to right: Melissa Cowen, Staff Officer; Chantelle Spence, Renfrew; Larissa Robertson, Brant Haldimand Norfolk; Colleen Harrington, Waterloo; Genevieve Guerra, Dufferin-Peel Secondary; Diana Corazza, Provincial Executive; Andrea Capostagno, Brant Haldimand Norfolk

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE PROVINCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE

The 2024 Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) Women's Symposium was co-hosted by the New Brunswick Teachers' Association and took place June 2 to 4 in Fredericton. The symposium brings together classroom teachers, union staff, and leadership from the various CTF member organizations across Canada to discuss issues affecting women in education.

The theme of this year's symposium – Unite, Inspire, Uplift! – recognized the unique lived experiences of women and the obstacles they face, particularly in education. OECTA delegates, which included members of the provincial Status of Women Committee, engaged in discussions on what empowers women's advancement. They were inspired by the wisdom and stories of the numerous guest speakers and gained knowledge on how to uplift each other and make fundamental progress both in the education sector and in society.

Participant reflections



Larissa Robertson

Chair, Status of Women Committee 2023-24
BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK UNIT

I attended “Widening the Door – Pathways and Presence to Leadership,” an interesting presentation on how different women navigated their path to leadership. Many women discussed their triumphs as well as the personal obstacles and challenges they faced when trying to move into leadership positions. Several women expressed guilt for leaving their children while they fulfilled their union duties.

When I was between the ages of 6 and 30, my mother was an active member of CUPE Local 1750, serving as Women’s Issues Committee Coordinator, Organizational & Technological Change Committee Coordinator, Vice-President, and eventually President. As a child who spent a lot of Labour Days walking in

the Toronto Labour Day parade, who participated in many marches and demonstrations, and spent countless Saturdays at the union office, I was able to assure all the women in the room that their children are indeed all right!

While some viewed my mother’s absence from my brother and I negatively, I saw her perseverance and her dedication. I made sure that the women in Fredericton knew that their children are watching them, and in most cases, will grow up to be just like them! Strong, dedicated, LEADERS!





Colleen Harrington

WATERLOO UNIT

“There are more CEOs with the name Michael, than there are women CEOs,” were the first words spoken by moderator and CTF President Heidi Yetman during the speakers’ panel presentation. To me, these words were pivotal in demonstrating just how much work still needs to be done to ensure that we are carving a space for women in leadership positions, and that the obstacles women face to get to those positions are, unfortunately, not yet a thing of the past.

One topic brought up in the panel was the stereotypes that women are often tied to. Lori Clark acknowledged that women are so often restricted, forced to straddle two lanes, the “cheerleader” archetype on one side and the “aggressor” on the other. This reality makes it that much more

difficult for women, as they then have the added burden of “breaking the mold” in order to reach their goals. However, in listening to Clark relay her experiences, it was reassuring to know that sexist comments and situations can be overcome – Clark is a clear example of that.

The most vital takeaway for me from the panel was that women can pave the way for more women, creating opportunities of mentorship. When you see another woman being fearless, unafraid to let others in the room know “I already said that,” it sends a clear message to other women that they have the power to do the same. Knowing, seeing, and listening to other powerful, accomplished women who have climbed to the top of their respective ladders, creates the pathway of leadership for more

women. Simply put, “you can’t be what you can’t see,” and being at this symposium gave me the opportunity to see just what is possible.

As Magali Picard so elegantly put it, “While it is wonderful that we are here, I dream of a day when we don’t need a women’s symposium.”

**“If you can’t hear,
you fear.”**

KELLYLEE EVANS



Genevieve Guerra

DUFFERIN-PEEL SECONDARY
UNIT



Heidi Yetman, CTF President.

When thinking about the CTF Women's Symposium, I, like others, reflected on how much work still needs to be done to support and elevate women in our society. But for me, as a South Asian-disabled woman, my yardstick is not only parity with men, but with other women. As one of the panelists remarked, "You can't become what you can't see," and as I stared at the predominantly white panel, I thought to myself, "Yes, and some of us are still looking for leadership that resembles them in more than just gender."

I was surprised and saddened to still see that at an event like this, in 2024, the demographic was still overwhelmingly white. There was a lot of great information and insight shared with participants, but when we consider intersectionality, the work we need to do

to lift each other up is exponentially greater. It is clear that we need to be more intentional in our support, mentoring, and promotion of diverse women.

As another speaker noted, "A group of women is explosive," and the symposium certainly provided a spark for participants to go out and champion change, champion other women. I look forward to encouraging more women to come together, all variety of women, and seeing the result of our collective efforts.

Chantelle Spence

RENFREW UNIT



Do you constantly prioritize others' needs over your own? For many years, I lived by the motto TOO (think of others) and I taught this in my classroom to my students and at home to my children. However, while listening to Kellylee Evans at the CTF Women's Symposium in Fredericton, I realized that I was not just thinking of others, I had been putting others before myself. It prompted me to reflect on how I have applied this philosophy throughout my life, and how I often silenced my inner voice.

My mother, who stayed with me when my husband traveled for work, used to be upset with me for staying up late to make lunches and doing household chores. One night after she had passed away, while I was doing my usual evening routine, I felt a sudden breeze in the laundry room that actually moved my

hair. I knew immediately that my mom was sending me a message. I felt and heard it. I stopped what I was doing and went straight to bed, signaling to my mom's spirit that I would rest.

My strong-willed, loving mother began to help me listen to the whispers of my inner voice. Gradually, the whispers grew louder, and I started to take actions for myself. I became more involved with my local OECTA unit. With the encouragement of other women, I put my name forward and was selected as a member of the OECTA provincial Status of Women Committee. One local member even took AQ Courses with me to support me in reaching the top of my grid; and at 47, I achieved my dream of joining the Canadian Ski Patrol.

These experiences have shown me that I am now truly unmuted. I am sure my mom has been cheering me on, wondering, "What were you waiting for? A loud concert?" In a way, I suppose I was.

I leave this experience with a question, a wish, a prayer, and a new motto. My question is, "How closely are you listening to your inner voice?" My wish is for the younger generation to be mindful of their inner voices and to not wait to listen. My prayer is that everyone listens to their inner voice early in life. And my new motto is, "Always listen to your inner voice. Sometimes it is loud. Sometimes it whispers. But it knows what is best for you."

"A group of women is explosive."

Andrea Capostagno

BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK
UNIT

The CTF Women’s Symposium was an incredibly empowering experience! I particularly enjoyed Dr. Kimberly McKay’s presentation on pathways to leadership within an organization. McKay emphasized, “How you engage your members is how you create leaders.”

Member engagement is crucial for the Association, and it extends beyond volunteerism to a broader scale of participation, encompassing commitment, motivation, and satisfaction. Members need to understand how their involvement can influence decisions within the Association. This engagement starts with the organizational structure, identifying and addressing any barriers or means of exclusion.

To increase member satisfaction and participation, we must focus on engagement,

imagination, and alignment. Association leaders need to explicitly make members feel welcome, supported, and heard. Many female members do not currently feel this way, leading to lower participation levels Association events and decisions.

Without visible female role models in leadership, many women lack the motivation to engage actively. The traditional “one size fits all” approach to union roles and decision-making is outdated, and must evolve to reflect the diverse and changing teaching profession.

Dr. Ashley Margeson’s discussion on teacher burnout was equally insightful. She highlighted how common these struggles are and shared practical tips for coping. Margeson stressed that self-care through strategies like planning

ahead and balancing personal, family, and work life – is essential for effective leadership.

It is time to reject traditional gender role expectations and break the silence. As Brene Brown wisely says, “You can’t do anything brave if you are wearing a straitjacket of what people think.” With this mindset, we can build a more inclusive and supportive environment for all members.

Larissa, Colleen, Genevieve, Chantelle, and Andrea are members of the 2023-24 provincial Status of Women Committee.



CTF Women’s Symposium participants.

Exploring the Galapagos Islands

A life-changing adventure in conservation and education

BY ZAHER HACHIMI

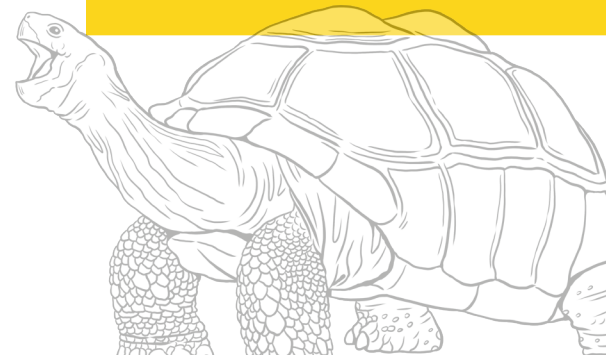
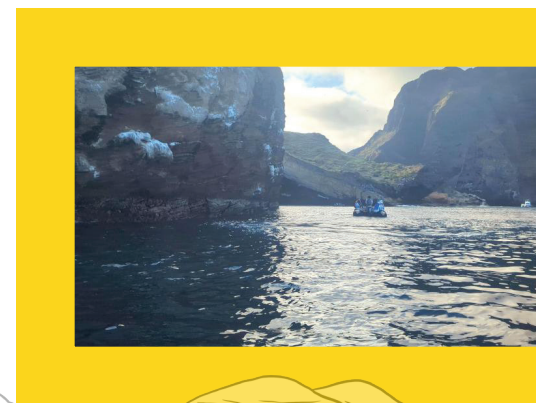


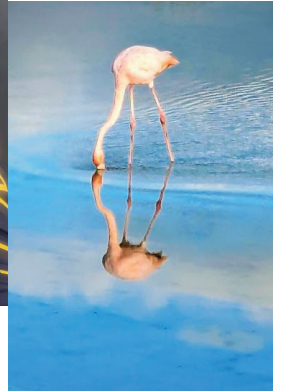
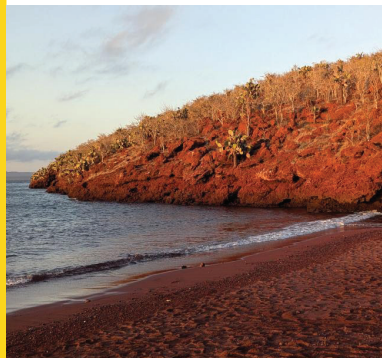
Vickie Morgado, a teacher with the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, was **selected as a 2024 Grosvenor Teacher Fellow** through the National Geographic Society and Lindblad Expeditions. This incredible opportunity took her to the heart of one of the most biologically diverse places on the planet, the Galapagos Islands. Armed with a passion for conservation and education, Vickie's journey transformed not only her perspective on the world, but how she plans to inspire her students to become stewards of a sustainable future.

Vickie returned from the Galapagos with a renewed sense of purpose – to foster environmental stewardship in her school and local community. Her experience reinforced the idea that small actions have global effects, a lesson she is eager to share with her students.

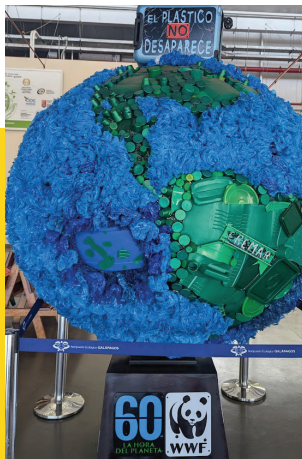
From building sustainable habits to becoming more conscious of the impact we have on the planet, Vickie's mission is to empower her students to be agents of change.

Click [HERE](#) to read more about Vickie's incredible adventure, in her own words.





Photos: provided by Vickie Morgado.



Applications closed November 14.

Want to be the next Grosvenor Teacher Fellow?

If you have a passion for exploration and a commitment to inspiring the next generation, consider applying for this unique professional development opportunity in 2025. Visit [National Geographic Society's Fellowship webpage](#) to learn more.

Applications typically open in September, with successful applicants announced the following spring.

This journey could be a transformative experience that reshapes your teaching and community engagement!

Zaher Hachimi is a Communications Specialist in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.

TRANSFORMING SUSTAINABLE CLASSROOMS WITH RESOURCES FOR RETHINKING

BY JACQUELINE WHELAN



As a seasoned teacher in environmental education, I have seen the transformative power of engaging students in environmental education. New teachers, eager to make a difference, often ask me for vetted, trusted resources. My go-to recommendation? Learning for a Sustainable Future's (LSF) **Resources for Rethinking** (R4R) database. It is a bilingual treasure trove of teacher-reviewed materials selected to help you integrate sustainability into your classroom.

Search smarter, teach greener

The R4R database hosts more than 1,800 peer reviewed, curriculum connected, free or low-cost lesson plans, videos, children's literature, outdoor activities, apps, games, and more! A great feature of the R4R database is its abundant filtering options. You can sift through thousands of resources by province or territory, then by grade, subject, or theme. Looking to introduce the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Indigenous perspectives into your learning activities? There is a filter for that.

In this database, you can also search for resources related to transformational teaching strategies (see **Connecting the Dots**).

- Explore the many action projects¹, including LSF's **Building a Vermicomposter Action Toolkit**.
- Launch a class inquiry using the **Science Teachers Association of Ontario's (STAO) Snail Inquiry** as a jumping off point to understand these fascinating creatures.
- Dive into STEM with **Drive It Green by Discovery Education**.

Are you interested in outdoor learning resources? Search by Outdoor Activities under resource type and find outdoor experiential learning resources, like **Five Minute Field Trips** from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

Teach and learn about nature right in your schoolyard with a single click.

Looking for a sustainability resource from an NGO or an environmental organization? Just click on resource publisher in the advanced search to find their educational materials. There are resources from approximately 600 publishers!

A personal highlight for me, many of these resources are available in both English and French. As a French Immersion teacher, I really appreciate that!

¹For more examples of Action Projects, check out LSF's **Our Canada Project**, a live map of youth-led initiatives happening across the country. These real-world stories show students that they have the power to make a difference, reinforcing the importance of taking action.

“New teachers, eager to make a difference, often ask me for vetted, trusted resources.”



Empowering teachers and students with climate change education

Students are increasingly feeling the impact of the climate crisis. Here in Ottawa—milder winters have kept the Rideau Canal closed for two years, extreme weather events like derechos and tornadoes have caused significant damage, and smoke from forest fires recently led to cancelled recess. Many of my students are, understandably, experiencing eco-anxiety. With resources like *Empowering the Youngest Learners in a Warming World* from the R4R database, educators can find the tools to inspire students rather than overwhelm them.

Age-appropriate UN SDG resources like the e-book *Frieda Makes a Difference* invite younger students to explore the goals and make connections between global challenges and their local communities.

Amplifying Indigenous voices

As we address climate change, it is essential that we include a wide range of voices, starting with those who have long been caretakers of the land. The R4R site honours Indigenous perspectives by including resources that explore Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and Etuaptmunk, the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing, which integrates Indigenous and Western perspectives.

These resources help teachers (un)learn and teach through a lens of respect for Indigenous knowledge systems, emphasising sustainability, interconnectedness, and stewardship. For example, resources like *The End of the Arctic* or *Climate Change in Great Bear Lake* invite students to learn about climate change from an Indigenous perspective and to cultivate respect for diverse ways of knowing.

The Resources for Rethinking (R4R) database equips teachers with tools and resources to integrate sustainability into their classrooms, supporting students as they learn to care for the Earth. Explore R4R. Use it as a tool to transform your teaching and inspire your students to shape a better, more sustainable future.



Jacqueline Whelan is working with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. She is a certified Forest School Practitioner, and a French as a Second Language and Social Studies specialist.

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Gifts you give yourself

BY MICHELLE DESPAULT

As we head into the holiday season – with the shopping, family gatherings, holiday parties, and travel – it is easy to get swept up in the “giving spirit” of the season. We are encouraged to dig deeper, be kinder, be joyous, and be there for others – even when we are not feeling it, or maybe despite not feeling it. It is what makes this time of year joyous and beautiful, but it is also what makes it exhausting and overwhelming.

We often think of giving in monetary terms or as physical presents, and we sometimes forget about the less tangible things that we offer, like our time and energy. While these non-monetary

items are things we can and do give generously, they are not gifts that we can receive in return. Ironically, the things we often need most are things we can only give ourselves.

We are all familiar with the in-flight safety demonstration where passengers are told to secure their own oxygen mask before assisting others. We know this direction is given because if we are in a weakened state, our ability to help others is diminished. We also know that they need to be explicit with this advice because for many of us, it runs counter to our nature – we want to help others before ourselves, or even at the expense of ourselves.

With the hustle and expectations of the season, we often forget to put our own metaphorical oxygen mask on and gift ourselves the things we need. As such, here are three gifts that you can give yourself this Christmas!

Say “no”

Many of us take on far more than we should. Between our work and our family obligations, between the things we want to do, need to do, and feel we should do, we are overloaded and are running ourselves ragged. This is only amplified over the holiday season.

This Christmas, give yourself the gift of saying “no!” Received an invitation you do not really want to accept? Don’t. Feeling overwhelmed by all the things you are being asked to do? Decline something. Contemplating if you really have to buy a gift for that cousin you never speak to except at Christmas dinner? Nope, you really don’t!

Saying no with ease can sometimes feel impossible – we loath the idea of disappointing others, letting them down, or being the target of criticism or gossip. We feel guilty when in reality our time, attention, and money are ours to give, and we get to decide when we give them.

They are not something that can be demanded of us. If people

have expectations of you that were not established or agreed upon by you, their disappointment at you not meeting those expectations is on them – not you! Saying no is a way of being clear with people about what they can expect from you to help minimize disappointment.

Saying no becomes easier when you have clearly established boundaries and priorities. Having a strong sense of what you want to participate in, your values, or what is non-negotiable helps the decision-making process. Also, be real about the potential ramifications, it is probably not as big a deal as you think, and definitely not more important than



staying true to yourself. Flex your “no” muscle at least once this holiday season. Consider it a warmup for its continued use in the new year.

Take time

When you consider your day, I would guess that most of the time is allocated for other people – your employer and your family being at the top of the list. Is there any time in your schedule that is purely for you? This holiday season, gift yourself time for you. What you do with the time is up to you. Do whatever helps fill your cup or recharge your batteries – that could be meditating, taking a bath, going for a walk, working out, or even going shopping. As long as it is time intentionally taken with only you in mind. Consider it your time to put your oxygen mask on.

“Embrace your choices – spending time as you choose, with people you really want to be with.”

This time will not magically appear in your calendar, you will need to be intentional about scheduling it in, carving it out in a day, and taking it when you can. With my busy day, I have taken to going for a walk in the evening after I put my son to bed (usually around 9 p.m.), and I will walk for an hour. I am so desperate for this time all to myself, I will walk in the rain or snow, and I use the time to listen to an audio book or a meditation, or just to be with my own thoughts. Lately, I have noticed that I am often stop at the grocery store on my way home. In fact, picking up a couple items at the store each night has become part of my routine and my husband messages me anything he wants me to grab while I am out. I used to think this was an efficient use of time, but I recognize that it is no longer my time. I am sharing this time with the family, and doing so is dictating my route so I can walk past the stores I need.

This holiday season I am reclaiming my time, and I recommend that you claim time for yourself as well. It does not matter if it is five minutes or 50. What you do with that time is also irrelevant – so long as you fight for that time and you do something that is all for you.

Ditch the guilt

So much of our inability to prioritize ourselves is the guilt we feel over our decisions and the impact we think they will have on others. We tell ourselves that people will be disappointed in us, or we believe that time taken for ourselves means less time for others. This is only heightened during the holidays when everything feels more “high stakes,” like our actions will either heighten or diminish others’ experience of the holiday.

We put so much emphasis on this time of year being extra special, in forging good memories that will last a lifetime, and creating lasting traditions – it is a lot of pressure! As a parent, I know the heightened desire I have to make Christmas a magical time for my son, and with that, I am all too familiar with the guilt that comes with not being able to do and provide all that he would want.

The reality is, we put this pressure on ourselves. And if we put it on, we can take it off. We can recognize that being fully present with others is better than being physically present and exhausted. The quality of the time spent together is better than the quantity. One special experience is better than half a dozen lackluster experiences. In doing for ourselves we are doing for others – so focus on how we are ultimately giving to others as opposed to taking away.

We can also recognize that we are not the only ones feeling this way. By sharing how we are empowering ourselves through the decisions we are making, we will empower others to do the same.

This Christmas, do not focus on what could or should be, just focus on what is. Embrace your choices – spending time as you choose, with people you really want to be with. Be present, in the moment, and take a deep breath. It is going to be great!

Michelle Despault is Director of Member Communications and Public Affairs in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.



Mental hygiene to support your mental health and wellness

BY SIMON DALLIMORE

Here we are, already in December, surrounded by carols, dazzling light displays, gift giving, laughter, school plays, and family meals. But, as is often the case, this season also brings an increase in anxiety.

According to the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) (CMHA), “52 per cent of Canadians report feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation during the holiday season.” Severe anxiety or other mental health-related concerns need to be taken seriously, and may need professional help. If you are concerned about your mental health, please make sure that you seek medical advice.

The Association has recently updated several resources, including a new one titled [Distinguishing Mental Health and Mental Illness](#).

All these documents can be found in the Members' Area at [catholicteachers.ca](#), under the section [Member Mental Health and Wellness](#).

A colleague at the Provincial Office recently shared with me the term “mental hygiene.” According to [The Royal Mental Health](#), “mental hygiene refers to daily activities that support and maintain mental health.” Just like the small daily tasks we are encouraged to do to maintain our physical and dental hygiene, there are small, daily tasks that we can do to help our mental health. Purposefully working on our mental wellness through actively engaging in some mental hygiene strategies may help with your overall well-being.

So, what exactly are mental hygiene strategies and how much time do they take? According to “[The Royal](#),” there are many small things that you can do on a regular basis to help your overall mental health. Unlike going to a gym, most strategies do not take up a lot of time and can easily be incorporated them into your day (although, going to the gym is a good strategy that not only helps your physical health, but also your mental health).

The five big strategies that most experts stress as things we should all focus on to help our mental health (and our overall well-being) include: hydration, proper nutrition, sleep, physical activity, and breathing.

Hydration

I love my morning coffee. If you are anything like me, that morning coffee usually turns into several throughout the day. I would usually stop for a coffee on my way to school each morning, have another cup just before the students came in for the day, and usually enjoy a third cup at some point throughout the day (it is a great excuse to take a five-minute break). I received many unique and funny coffee mugs from students throughout my years. But as we know, coffee is no substitute for water.

So how do we work water into our day? Mike Anderson, in his book *Rekindle Your Professional Fire: Powerful Habits for Becoming a More Well-Balanced Teacher*, suggests that we start the day off right by having a large glass of water first thing in the morning, before that first cup of coffee. Taking a large, refillable water bottle with you to school should also help you to stay hydrated throughout the day. Since incorporating this into my day, my coffee intake has dropped considerably, and I have found that I have more energy.



Proper nutrition

There are so many different food options out there and nutrition experts give us advice on what we should and should not eat. The problem for me is that most of the suggestions or ideas I have tried take up precious time. Sometimes, it just takes too much to prepare a healthy meal. Before long it all falls apart and I am back to packing lunches that are not as healthy for me, which makes me anxious because I am not following my plan for a healthy diet. It can become a vicious cycle.

You can start small. Anderson suggests that we can start by looking in the desk drawers in our classroom. What do you bring as a snack? Can you change the snack to include fresh fruit and vegetables? Are you able to chop up a few extra vegetables for your snack the day before while you are making dinner? If you prepare something



ahead of time, it is easier in the morning as you are trying to head out the door to grab the container of vegetables you prepared the night before.

What about staff meetings? We always had chips, chocolate, donuts, or a few high-salt and sugary snacks out for staff meetings. Could you start bringing healthy snacks to staff meetings? Maybe there are a few of you at the school who could start that movement together!

Sleep

We are told by so many different experts that sleep is very important for our physical and mental health. [The Public Health Agency of Canada](#) recommends that adults between the ages of 18 to 64 should get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Public Health has a number of suggestions that might help you improve the quality of sleep. Use this [link](#) to access their list of recommendations.



Physical activity

Two mental hygiene strategies recommended by [The Royal](#) are exercising and getting outside. Walking is a great way to do both. We have a walking Wednesday group at Provincial Office! Every Wednesday, Staff Officer Anthony Carabache (thank you Anthony!) leads a group of us on a walk over our lunch hour. He sets a goal for the group each month and we do our best to meet or exceed that goal. The only kilometres that count are the ones that we do together on the specified day. It provides us with exercise, a chance to be outside, and an opportunity to chat with people about things other than work.

Are you able to get a walking club together at your school? It could be over lunch or after school. It could start small with just a couple of people willing to head out. We at Provincial Office would

love to have some challengers from different schools to see who can walk further each month. Please let us know if you get a group and would like to set up a challenge. It could be fun!



Breathing

Taking a few minutes to do a simple breathing exercise can be a great way to bring down your stress and help you refocus for the day. We all have access to Starling Minds through OTIP.

Starling Minds, if you have not already registered, is a free service that includes different mental health supports, including several short, five-minute guided breathing exercises. You can access [Starling Minds](#) through the [OTIP website](#) or through the Members' Area at [catholicteachers.ca](#), via the [Member Mental Health and Wellness webpage](#). The password to register is: Member.

These are just a few small things that you can try to introduce into your daily routine. Focusing on small goals and changes is a great place to start. If these are all strategies that you already incorporate into your daily routine, are you able to support others as they attempt to focus on mental hygiene strategies? Mental health is something that needs to be talked about and supported.

Your mental wellness is important. Paying attention to mental hygiene is a great way to help your overall wellness, both physical and mental. If you feel that you are dealing with something more than stress, or a dip in your overall well-being, then please reach out to your doctor, see a counsellor, use your board's employee assistance program (EAP), or access other supports through Starling Minds and OTIP. If you have any questions about your benefits or how to access support resources, please contact your local OECTA unit office.

Simon Dallimore is a Staff Officer in the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office.

Signs of hope

BY SIMON DALLIMORE

I love this time of year (I am writing this article at the end of November). The mornings are cool, and there is a different kind of silence on my early morning walks. The homes in my neighbourhood have their Christmas displays out. We are getting ready for the Advent season, and I can feel a sense of hope in the air.

Abbey and Skye, our two husky-Pyrenees dogs, love the cooler temperatures and our weekend walks. They gleefully bounce from one leaf pile to the next, resembling little kids playing in the leaves. I swear they have a huge grin on their faces as they surface from the leaf piles, eagerly searching for the next target on our walk.

There is a route that I like to walk near our home that takes us through a forested area. It is peaceful under the trees and the noise of the city seems to disappear. The ground is usually crunchy under the morning frost. We often come across rabbits, foxes, and the occasional deer on our morning walks – adding to my love of this time of year.

I also love walking through the woods, because someone has taken the time to decorate the forest. In winter, there are frozen wreaths (round blocks of ice with cedar branches, pinecones, and red berries frozen in the centre). We often

come across small rocks scattered along the path, or left on benches, all painted with different messages. You need to pay attention, or you might miss them as you walk along. Sometimes, I come across people out for morning walks and they have their heads down, glued to their phones. I want to stop them and point out all the things they are missing around them.

Some of the small stones are decorated with hand-painted pictures of flowers or smiley faces. Others have a word or two written across them. It puts a smile on my face when I come across rocks with the words “hope,” “joy,” “peace,” and “love” written on them. Regardless of the time of year, it reminds me of the message of Advent, and it gives me hope that these are messages that are being put out there for people to find.

Christmas is a time of year with hundreds of messages. Some are bright and noisy. A lot are hard to miss. Think of the commercials we start to see on TV as early as October. Some tug on our heart strings, while others are bright and upbeat, all trying to get us to spend money.

Not all signs are bright and loud, some are subtle and require you to pay attention. In my opinion, the quiet

messages that you come across unexpectedly are the most significant. These are the ones that make you stop and think or put a smile on your face.

The stones that are scattered around the forest are examples of the soft, subtle messages that we can reflect on over Christmas. They are not clamoring for attention, but when you come across them, they help to spread hope, joy, love, and peace.

The first time I joined Kim's family for Christmas, I was almost overwhelmed by the chaos and noise of the home. I come from a very small family where Christmases were quiet. Kim's family is a lot larger, busier, and louder. However, the home was always full of joy and love.

Kim's mum loved tinsel. She draped the tree in large clumps of it. You could find tinsel left in the home long after the Christmas decorations were packed up and put away. You could argue that it was too much for one small tree; however, once the lights of the home went out and the room was only lit by the Christmas tree, it was magical. The tinsel made the tree sparkle.

This sight always reminded me of Luke's passage (2:9-10): "Suddenly an angel appeared among them, and

the landscape shone bright with the glory of the Lord. They were badly frightened, but the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone.'"

As I write this article, we are approaching Advent, which is a time for reflection and preparation for the birth of Jesus. We will light the Advent candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. As we light each candle, we are reminded of the Christmas story and the hope it provides us.

For many of us, we are seeing a world that seems to have lost hope, peace, joy, and love. My prayer for you this Advent season is to look for the small signs that give you hope. The small signs that put a smile on your face. The small signs that remind all of us that God is with us and that there can be hope, peace, joy, and love in the world. From my family to yours, I hope that you have a joyful Christmas and find time to reconnect and recharge.

Simon Dallimore is a Staff Officer in the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office.

Based on a true story

BY GIAN MARCON

I have always been drawn to films or novels that are “based on a true story.” From an early age, that simple phrase tweaked my interest by its implied realism and authenticity. It soon became apparent to me that more often than not, the term “based on a true story” was very loosely and liberally used as a type of stratagem to lure those as impressionable as I was.

One of my early lessons on connotation involved the word “based,” as I realized that the word allowed for a significant amount of creative latitude. “Based” gave an author or screenwriter the opportunity to take the smallest kernel of “truth” and extrapolate as their creative desires or narrative needs required.

Films in particular seemed to take the most liberties with the source material on which they were supposedly founded. As for books, the novels that attested to being similarly inspired – while more likely to have a factual background – still sacrificed material in favour of a more compelling narrative.

It developed in me a healthy cynicism about just how accurate any story I encountered actually was. This all

changed when I encountered my first book of narrative nonfiction – a genre that was in its infancy. *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote was published in 1965 and entered my life in the mid 1970s. The book took a horrific historical event and presented it as a compelling story where the historical figures were presented as characters in an impeccably researched narrative that remained true to actual events.

In Cold Blood was one of the first works of narrative nonfiction that can be traced back to the New Journalism movement of the 1960s, which had the aim of taking factual reporting and imbuing it with literary sensibilities. Since then, the genre has flourished and produced some modern day classics. Authors like John Berendt, Erik Larsen, Simon Winchester, John Krakauer, and Hunter S. Thompson have elevated the genre of narrative nonfiction (also called literary nonfiction) to a popular and respected literary form.

Currently, I am reading *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* by Simon Winchester, which is the story of the first Oxford English Dictionary. As the title implies,

Winchester's focus is on the contributions of both its self-made editor and its most prolific and notorious contributor. As with many effectively rendered works of literary nonfiction – the author is adept at taking what might appear to be the historical record and infusing it with relatable digressions and engaging sketches that are both educational and fascinating.

Over the years, there have been various books in the genre that have provided personal enjoyment and edification.

Barbarian Days by William Finnegan is a Pulitzer Prize-winning book that traces the travels of the writer on a journey of self-discovery while he surfs the world's greatest breaks.

City of Falling Angels has author John Berendt (better-known for *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*) travel to Venice to investigate the catastrophic fire of La Fenice opera house, only to discover an undiscovered side of the city.

Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania by Erik Larsen (who has emerged as a master of the literary nonfiction genre with celebrated contributions like *Devil in the White City*), uses a shifting narrative technique that creates tension and suspense despite the story's known conclusion.

Seabiscuit by Laura Hillenbrand (who, like Larsen, has become synonymous with narrative nonfiction) captures the Depression era through the inspiring story of the undersized horse that overcame the odds to become a champion.

The Man Who Loved Books Too Much by Allison Hoover Bartlett is about an eccentric, obsessive rare book thief of first editions, and the efforts of a bookseller-turned-amateur-detective to capture him.

Many years ago, when a teacher of mine shared their copy of *In Cold Blood* with me, I was unaware of just how impactful it would be on my future choice of reading material. Narrative nonfiction has been a staple of my reading diet, and I often have both a nonfiction book as well as a novel on the go simultaneously. Whether the subject is biographical, historical, sports-related, or any number of eclectic topics, literary nonfiction can provide an interesting, informative, and enjoyable reading experience.

If you are so inclined, you could check out any number of lists that are posted online under “best narrative nonfiction”, or check out one of the recommendations that have been listed here – happy reading.



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