

MAY 2025 ISSUE

# Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

## AGM 2025 Highlights

**THE 69TH UN COMMITTEE  
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

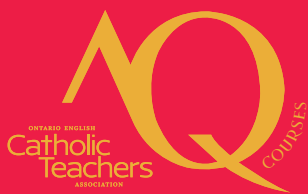
**PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT  
AND THE RIGHTS OF  
EQUITY-DESERVING STUDENTS  
IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**THOUGHTS ON THE SNAP  
PROVINCIAL ELECTION**

**PLUS:**

**Great Reads by Catholic Teachers  
Building Mental Hygiene Habits**





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succeed.**



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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



A lot has transpired since our last edition of *Catholic Teacher* magazine, both within our Association and across political landscapes. In Ontario, we endured another sweeping provincial election, the outcome of which has positioned the Ford government with a mandate for a third term. By no means is this the result we hoped for. Our advocacy efforts, which were sophisticated and immense in the days and months leading up to this snap election, certainly impacted some key ridings that we targeted. Premier Ford's aspiration of achieving 100-plus seats and his call for a stronger mandate were not achieved. In fact, after spending nearly \$180 million on the election, the Ford government ended up with less seats, sending three ministers home.

Together, at all levels of the Association, we worked around the clock and canvassed across all conditions. We shared our message and put forward our best efforts to elect an education-friendly government, and candidates who support and advocate for the needs and values of a high-quality publicly funded education system. We created opportunities to dig deep, mobilize, and inspire voters to make a change for the better. We made significant enhancements to our Political Action Committee (PAC) infrastructures across the province, building capacity both as individuals and as an Association. Catholic teachers were present in key ridings and their energy and efforts were noted, furthering partnerships at Queen's Park.

Our election-readiness efforts were about so much more than just the recent provincial election, they were about engaging Catholic teachers and building relationships with those who value publicly funded public education. Through our work in the lead-up to the provincial election, we opened doors in our communities with community groups, allies, and opposition parties. We will continue to advocate for collaboration and respect; and we must maintain our efforts and energies as we turn our focus to trustee elections and the future of bargaining. We must hold trustees and school boards accountable. We must expect them to speak up for better schools and funding; to serve as allies seeking respectful working conditions that will enable teachers to serve our children and our communities better.

High-quality publicly funded education is Ontario's great equalizer, and we cannot lose sight of the economic and democratic value of education and the role we play as teachers. Public education is the foundation of a strong economy, and our uncertain economic future depends on the success of our students and their learning now more than ever. This has been fundamental to building Canada's success, where our strong and supported publicly funded education systems stand in contrast to failed U.S. privatized models.

With the swearing in of the new Ford government cabinet came yet another shuffle. Most noteworthy was the appointment of Paul Calandra as the new Minister of Education, making this Ontario's fourth education minister in less than a year. We are always ready to work collaboratively with government to best support students and strengthen publicly funded education; however, the revolving door of ministers this past year has made it difficult as ministers have failed to engage meaningfully to address critical issues affecting our schools. We have been clear that there is benefit to consultation that respects the experience and expertise of teachers as partners, and we continue to seek such opportunities.



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Amidst the political turbulence and challenges we experience, we are mindful of our successes. As recently as March 7, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down provisions of Ontario's Bill 307, *Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act*, 2021, rewarding our political efforts with another major victory. The Ford government pushed through this unconstitutional election spending bill limiting third-party election advertising by employing the notwithstanding clause. Seven years in the making, this victory is important for Ontarians because it ensures voices are heard and voters can make a truly informed decision at the ballot box. It is thanks to your Association, alongside the Working Families Coalition, that this decision was made, ensuring that we can all contribute equally and equitably to the democratic processes in our province.

Elections at all levels matter to the future and fairness of workers, including Catholic teachers, and we will continue to do whatever we can to mobilize in this direction at all levels. This was a key theme at our Annual General Meeting in March. With all positions on the Provincial Executive and Ontario Teachers' Federation Governors up for election this year, we witnessed the democratic processes within our own Association at work.

From our classrooms to our communities, may we continue to lead with hope as we persist in our support of publicly funded Catholic education and the future we seek.

In solidarity,



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](mailto:publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca).

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

## MAY

### Asian and South Asian Heritage Month

- 1 May Day
- 1 Bursaries Application Deadline
- 1 Provincial Committee Application Deadline
- 4-9 Catholic Education Week
- 5 National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People
- 5-11 Mental Health Week
- 11 Mother's Day
- 12 Mini-Courses - Spring Courses Begin
- 12-18 National Nurses Week
- 15 Global Accessibility Awareness Day
- 16 World Education Support Personnel Day
- 17 International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia
- 19 Victoria Day
- 15-31 National AccessAbility Week

## JUNE

### National Indigenous History Month Pride Month Right to Strike Month (OECTA recognized)

- 2-8 Canadian Environment Week
- 5 World Environment Day
- 12 World Day Against Child Labour
- 15 Father's Day

# Events

## / Thank you Catholic teachers!

While the provincial election results were disappointing, Catholic teachers can be proud of our tireless advocacy and work on-the-ground to champion what our students need to succeed – real investment in our schools.

Many of you gave up your weekends to take part in election readiness training sessions to learn best practices to get out the vote, and braved the cold to canvass in key ridings across the province. You knocked on doors, made phone calls on behalf of education-friendly candidates, and had important conversations about schools with family, friends, and neighbours.

Together, our critical work:

- Helped re-elect education-friendly candidates targeted by Doug Ford's Conservatives, including NDP Education Critic and MPP Chandra Pasma in Ottawa West-Nepean, former Liberal party Education Critic and MPP Karen McCrimmon in Kanata-Carleton, MPP Tom Rakocovic in Humber River-Black Creek, and others.
- Flipped previously held Conservative seats, electing more voices to Queen's Park that will stand up for teachers and students – like Liberal party candidates Lee Fairclough in Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Tyler Watt in Nepean.
- Denied Doug Ford's desire for a stronger mandate, as the Conservatives lost seats overall.

And our work is just getting started!

This was a cynical snap election, designed to silence our voices and drive down turnout. But we persevered, raised the profile of education and our Association, and laid a strong foundation to continue our advocacy and hold the Ford government to account.

**Thank you!**

**Your activism in this election was extraordinary. Let's keep the momentum going as we power change together for a better Ontario!**

*Catholic teachers taking action across the province during the provincial election to support education-friendly candidates, joining our election readiness training sessions, canvasses, and much more to power change together.*









# Highlights



Debate and voting on resolutions is a core part of AGM business. The by-laws, policies, and procedures that are passed become part of the Association's *Handbook* forming what are essentially the rules governing our Association. Action directives that are passed speak to the priorities of the Association and note a lobbying effort or investigation the Association will undertake over the coming year. This year, delegates got down to business dealing with an impressive 98 per cent of resolutions put forward.

A resolution is determined to have been dealt with once a disposition or direction is given – this could include a resolution being debated and then passing or failing. A resolution can be withdrawn, in which case it does not get debated; or it can be referred for study and report back (often by the General Secretary) to the next AGM. Resolutions that do not hit the floor and are not dealt with may be brought forward to next year's AGM if the sponsor is willing.

98 resolutions were brought forward to AGM 2025. They ranged from housekeeping items, like updating the official name of programs, to financial resolutions on how much of the member dues collected provincially will be provided back to local units, and policy changes on how complaints are handled by the Association.

Click **HERE** to see the full list of resolutions submitted and carried, as well as the reports reviewed at AGM 2025.

Delegates also elected the Provincial Executive and OTF Governors for the 2025-2027 term. The newly constituted executive will take office on July 1 for a two-year term. Executive members include:

- René Jansen in de Wal, President (Toronto Secondary)
- Barb Dobrowolski, Past President (Eastern Ontario)
- Lisa Lacaria, First Vice-President (Superior North)
- Sharon Giroux, Vice-President of Equity (St. Clair Elementary)
- Anthony Rocchio, Second Vice-President (Sudbury Elementary)
- Julie Altomare-Di Nunzio, Third Vice-President (Toronto Elementary)
- Michel Derikx, Treasurer (Hamilton-Wentworth)

- Melissa Garrett, Councillor (Waterloo)
- Erin Van Moorsel, Councillor (Bruce-Grey Elementary)
- Chris Cowley, OTF Table Officer (Brant Haldimand Norfolk)

OTF Governors include:

- Rick Belisle, Nipissing Secondary
- Chris Cowley, Brant Haldimand Norfolk
- Jason Haraschuk, Dufferin-Peel Secondary
- Paul Kiely, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Andrew Robertson, Dufferin-Peel Secondary

Once again, a sizeable number of delegates identified this as the first AGM they have attended, and many of the voices heard at the microphones noted they were first-time speakers. Additionally, a record number of attendees identified as being First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or from a recognized equity-deserving group. All ten members of the Diversity Advisory Board were in attendance with five members being voting delegates, as per the resolutions passed at last year's AGM. Having new and diverse delegates and speakers is key to increasing the breadth of perspectives, experiences, and contributions brought forward at AGM.

A couple of notable changes this year; in an effort to better enable participation of members with disabilities, non-stationary handheld microphones were added. These microphones were assigned to specific members upon their request, negating the need to stand and navigate to one of the specific stationary microphones around the room. While work still needs to be done to streamline the new system, the new microphones were well received.

With every position on the provincial executive up for election, there was limited time available for the various guest speakers that typically attend AGM in person. This year, Bea Bruske, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, and Heidi Yetman, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, both submitted video greetings. A synopsis of their greetings can be found on page 14.

Click **HERE** to watch President René Jansen in de Wal's AGM thank you video.







first time speakers



delegates



debate



reports

**MEMBERSHIP... AT A GLANCE...**

**644 VOTING DELEGATES**

**TOTAL WORKING MEMBERS 39,626**

**FTE 35,067**

**OTs 4,438**

**CONED. 121**

**IN MEMORIAM GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN**

James Ryan  
Doug McCarthy  
"When all that is left of me is love... give me away."  
-M. Malloy

**SHAME!**

**3,500 fewer teachers under Doug Ford**

**GET INVOLVED JOIN A PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE BY MAY 1ST**

**PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE 2025-2027**

- PRESIDENT → Rene Jansen in de Wal
- VPOF EQUITY → Sharon Giroux
- 1ST VP → Lisa Lacaria
- 2ND VP → Anthony Rocchio
- 3RD VP → Julie Altomare-Di Nunzio
- TREASURER → Michel Derikx
- COUNCILLOR → Melissa Garrett
- COUNCILLOR → Erin Van Moorsel
- OTF TABLE OFFICER → Chris Cowley
- OTF GOVERNOR → Rick Belisle
- OTF GOVERNOR → Chris Cowley
- OTF GOVERNOR → Jason Haraschuk
- OTF GOVERNOR → Paul Kiely
- OTF GOVERNOR → Andrew Robertson

**WE MUST STOP TREATING KIDS as an EXPENSE and START TREATING KIDS as an INVESTMENT**

Marit Shiles, NDP Leader

**agm 2025**  
annual general meeting  
March 7-10 Toronto

**RETENTION**

APPROX. 40,000 teachers CERTIFIED & IN GOOD STANDING

Choosing NOT to work in ONTARIO's education system

use of unqualified teachers

unfilled jobs

**FIRST TIME AT THE MIC**  
Total: 24

**BUSINESS CONDUCTED**

96 RESOLUTIONS

55 CARRIED  
32 LOST  
6 WITHDRAWN  
1 OUT OF ORDER  
2 STUDY+REPORT

**1 PRO**  
**2 CON**

**2025 PROVINCIAL election AFTERMATH**

- Continue to ENGAGE
- Continue to BUILD capacity
- FOCUS
- collective gaining
- elect student-friendly TRUSTEES

**introducing the RDAMING mic**

**ORDER!**

**DIVISION!**

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**#KIDSPAINED**

@redcrunchyapple ©2025  
Maggie Caserta, DufferinPeel Elementary

# Awards recognition

## GINO DICIOCCO

*/ Life Membership Award*

Gino DiCiocco dedicated his career to supporting OECTA members. He served as First Vice-President of the Halton Secondary Unit from 1996 to 2000 before becoming Unit President in 2001, overseeing significant membership growth. His leadership led to the creation of a First Vice-President release officer position, strengthening support for teachers. In 2007, Gino became a Staff Officer in the Provincial Office's Contract Services department, later part of Bargaining and Contract Services, where he remained until his retirement in 2021. Known for his deep expertise and fierce advocacy, he worked closely with Unit Presidents to ensure effective grievance resolutions and supported injured workers' claims. He played a key role in shaping Bill 127, which improved workers' compensation for mental stress injuries. A steadfast advocate for human rights and equity, Gino's legacy of solidarity and dedication earns him the honour of a Life Membership Award.

## MICHAEL ENNETT

*/ Pearse Shannon Memorial Association Service Award*

Michael Ennett's legacy of service, mentorship, and advocacy is profound. A longtime teacher at St. Michael's High School in Stratford, he led the Huron-Perth Secondary Unit as President for 16 years, fiercely supporting members. In 2015, he joined the Provincial Office's Bargaining and Contract Services department, where his expertise in language and detail strengthened collective agreements. Known for his intelligence, kindness, and composure, Mike provided clarity in high-pressure negotiations. His meticulous approach to contract language helped prevent conflicts and ensured fair outcomes. After retiring in 2022, his passing in 2023 left colleagues and students mourning a remarkable leader and friend. For his lasting contributions to OECTA, we proudly honour Michael Ennett posthumously with the Pearse Shannon Memorial Association Service Award.

## GIAN MARCON

*/ Life Membership Award*

Gian Marcon's decades of service earned him deep respect among OECTA members. A Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit member, he started as an Association Rep, mentoring new teachers and emphasizing self-advocacy. As Chief Negotiator from 1999 to 2005, he secured two consecutive agreements without disruption, despite previous job actions. Elected Unit President in 2005, he led 2,300 teachers with fairness and integrity. Gian championed interest-based bargaining, prioritizing resolutions over conflicts. In 2015, he became a Staff Officer in Bargaining and Contract Services at the Provincial Office, where his keen insights and steady leadership guided OECTA through complex negotiations. A skilled mediator, he fostered collaboration and clarity, ensuring productive outcomes. For his unwavering commitment to Catholic education, labour relations, and the Association, we proudly honour Gian Marcon with a Life Membership Award.

## PETER MACDONALD

*/ Pearse Shannon Memorial Association Service Award*

Peter MacDonald's career spans journalism, education, and advocacy. A member of the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit for 17 years, he served as Association Rep, Political Advisory Committee member, and Chief Negotiator from 2007 to 2011. From 2011 to 2017, Peter served as Unit President. He fought hard for teachers' rights, successfully eliminating the board's attendance support program. His leadership in political activism led to the creation of a joint affiliate Political Action Committee. In 2017, Peter became a Staff Officer in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department, later leading the department through critical political challenges, including snap elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. A strategic thinker and mentor, Peter has shaped OECTA's political advocacy in difficult times. In recognition of his dedication and impact, we proudly present Peter MacDonald with the Pearse Shannon Memorial Association Service Award.

## JOHN PECSENYE

*/ Life Membership Award*

John Pecsénye's dedication to OECTA spans local and provincial roles. Beginning in 1986 as a Councillor in Toronto Elementary, he became Unit President in 2003, promoting democracy and professional growth. In 2007, he joined the Provincial Office, contributing to bargaining, contract services, and health and safety. Since 2017, John has been instrumental in strengthening protections under the *Health and Safety Act*, particularly in addressing school violence. His leadership led to a landmark arbitrator's decision, improving incident reporting and embedding protective language in collective agreements across Ontario. Committed to equity and inclusivity, John ensured OECTA not only met bargaining goals but grew stronger in the process. For his relentless advocacy and transformative impact on member rights, we are honoured to recognize John Pecsénye with a Life Membership Award.

## STEVE DE QUINTAL

*/ Fintan Kilbride Memorial Social Justice Recognition Award*

Steve De Quintal embodies service, faith, and social justice. A religion teacher at St. Mary's Catholic Academy and Toronto Secondary Unit member, he inspires students and colleagues alike. Known for his kindness, optimism, and deep commitment to equity, he ensures every student feels valued and supported. Steve leads social justice initiatives, motivating students to engage with their communities selflessly. He offers unwavering support to colleagues, always recognizing and uplifting their contributions. His dedication to faith-driven service and advocacy for those in need reflects the ideals of Gospel virtues. A true servant leader, Steve's commitment to justice and compassion makes him a very deserving recipient of the Fintan Kilbride Memorial Social Justice Recognition Award.



## KEVIN O'DWYER

*/ Marion Tyrrell Memorial Award of Merit*

Kevin O'Dwyer's 40-year career with OECTA is defined by his expertise in interest-based bargaining and labour advocacy. From the 1997 political protest to leading the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit as President from 1999 to 2005, he played a key role in pivotal negotiations. Elected OECTA President in 2011, he championed equity, fair hiring, and protections for vulnerable members, including 2SLGBTQIA+ students. He signed the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding, reshaping teacher contracts across Ontario. Later, as a Provincial Staff Officer, he continued advancing health and safety rights, ensuring fair employment policies. A methodical and respected leader, Kevin's contributions have left a lasting impact on member rights and OECTA's bargaining strategies. For his exceptional service, we honour Kevin O'Dwyer with the Marion Tyrrell Award of Merit.



**(L-R)** David Church, General Secretary; John Pecsénye; Gian Marcon; Peter MacDonald; Steve De Quintal; Kevin O'Dwyer; Gino DiCiocco; Laura Ennett, accepting on behalf of Michael Ennett; and René Jansen in de Wal, President.

Click **HERE** to watch the AGM 2025 Awards videos.

# Congratulations to our award recipients!

## Tribute to Shannon Hogan

### OFL Solidarity and Pride Champion Award Winner

Each year, through their Solidarity and Pride Champion Award, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) acknowledges and celebrates individuals or groups who have made a significant or ongoing contribution to the advancement of 2SLGBTQIA+ human rights, equity, and inclusion.

This year, that award was presented posthumously to Catholic teacher and OECTA provincial Staff Officer Shannon Hogan for her tremendous contributions to uplifting the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. The impact of her work lives on in the hearts and lives of so many, both today and for years to come.

Click [HERE](#) to watch Shannon's tribute video.



Ren  Jansen in de Wal, OECTA President; John Hogan, Shannon's brother; and Laura Walton, OFL President

## Recognition of Doug McCarthy and James Ryan

At this year's AGM, we were all deeply moved by a heartfelt tribute that honoured the lives of two exceptional Catholic teachers – former OECTA President James Ryan and former head of the OECTA Speakers Bureau Doug McCarthy – whose recent passings were felt across the Catholic education community.

Listening to Staff Officer Yvonne Runstedler speak about James Ryan, it was clear just how much he meant to so many. She reminded us that while James held various roles in OECTA, it was the classroom that truly had his heart. He was described as someone who genuinely liked people – someone who could disagree respectfully and still make you laugh with a well-timed pun. His kindness, humour, and humility made him a pillar in both his professional and personal life. It was a touching reminder of how much one person's presence can lift a room.

Yvonne spoke about Doug McCarthy with equal admiration. Doug's career stretched back to the 1960s, starting in a three-room schoolhouse and growing into decades of leadership as a principal, mentor, and public speaker. Doug's name is one many associate with wisdom, encouragement, and passion. Yvonne spoke of his boundless energy, his love of storytelling, and his devotion to his family and faith. He was someone who not only led, but inspired – who did not simply teach, but empowered.

Both James and Doug were unique in their paths and contributions to the Association, but they shared a common spirit: one of service, compassion, and a deep commitment to Catholic education. As Yvonne finished, there was a quiet sense in the room – a shared gratitude for their lives, and a shared responsibility to carry their legacy forward.

Click [HERE](#) to watch the full tribute video.



## Health & Safety Caucus



For the third consecutive year, members of the Provincial Health and Safety Committee hosted a breakfast caucus meeting on the theme of Know Your Rights. Despite the early start time, the event was packed, with approximately 100 participants.

Chair Lina Brunone and other committee members discussed workplace violence and answered attendees' questions on a variety of topics related to workplace health and safety. Participants left the caucus with a better understanding of how to report workplace violence and harassment, deal with a toxic work environment, initiate a work refusal, and understand the employer's obligations to keep you safe at work.

It was standing room only for the early morning event. Other committee members in attendance included: David Rosso; Jolly-Béatrice Toussaint; Maria Commisso; Nicole Gallinger; Provincial Executive liaison Michel Derikx; and Provincial Office staff liaison and Head of the Bargaining and Contract Services department, Katrina Wheaton.

Click [HERE](https://catholicteachers.ca) to access resources and information on health and safety at [catholicteachers.ca](https://catholicteachers.ca).

## Human Right Workshop



Acclaimed poet Brandon Wint led a deeply moving human rights workshop titled *Who Taught You How to Love*, blending poetry and storytelling to explore love, identity, and ancestry.

A Black, disabled, and prayerful poet, Brandon shared reflections from his life, weaving personal narratives with themes of family, culture, and intergenerational lessons on love. Through readings from his work, Brandon illustrated how love manifests in different forms – in prayer, humor, gestures, and even unspoken words.

He shared intimate stories of his Caribbean upbringing, his relationship with his grandparents, and the complexities of expressing and receiving love. His poetry, rich with gratitude and reflection, underscored the deep connections between love, survival, and personal history.

During the Q&A, Brandon discussed poetry as a means of reclaiming identity, particularly in the face of societal expectations. He emphasized the power of vulnerability in art and the responsibility of using creativity to serve something greater – love itself. His session left attendees with a profound reminder that love, like poetry, is a language we must learn, nurture, and pass on.

## Guest Speakers



**Michael (Mike) Foulds**, the 81<sup>st</sup> President of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), delivered an engaging in-person address, outlining the OTF's ongoing advocacy and priorities for 2025. He emphasized the Federation's strong stance against privatization, highlighting its efforts to combat policies that undermine publicly funded education. Foulds also spoke about the OTF's political collaboration and commitment to supporting the province signing on to the national School Food Program, ensuring schools have the necessary infrastructure for successful implementation. Recognizing the increasing role of artificial intelligence in education, he discussed the OTF's work in exploring ethical considerations and responsible integration. He also addressed one of the most pressing challenges in the sector – the teacher recruitment and retention crisis – criticizing the Ford government's inadequate solutions and pointing out that many certified teachers are not actively working in classrooms. On pensions, Foulds reassured members of the OTF's dedication to protecting retirement security, referencing the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) governance and the upcoming valuation. He shared the story of a teacher who retired in the 1970's who continues to live with financial stability, vowing to uphold that same promise for today's educators. He closed with a commitment to pressing the government and Ministry of Education to ensure safe and well-resourced schools, advocating for policies that truly support teachers and students.



**Bea Bruske**, President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), delivered an inspiring video address to AGM delegates, recognizing the incredible contributions of teachers and expressing deep frustration that educators must constantly fight for basic resources. She emphasized that teachers are the backbone of the education system, yet their concerns – such as violence in classrooms and the growing teacher recruitment and retention crisis – are too often ignored by the Ford government. Bruske stressed that with an election on the horizon, it was the time to make our voices heard. She urged teachers to mobilize, engage in advocacy, and most importantly, vote for leaders who prioritize public education and genuinely support teachers and workers. She assured Catholic teachers that the CLC stands firmly in their corner, committed to amplifying their voices and pushing for meaningful change. Bruske's message was an important call to action, reminding teachers of their collective strength and the critical role they play in shaping the future of education in Canada.



**Heidi Yetman**, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), delivered a powerful video address, emphasizing the vital work teachers and school staff do to support students and families. She highlighted CTF's role in amplifying OECTA's voice nationally, providing advocacy, data, and programming to address key issues like working conditions, teacher attrition, and violence in schools. Yetman celebrated the national approval of the School Food Program, while acknowledging local implementation challenges and assuring teachers that the CTF is working with all levels of government to ensure success. She also addressed Canada's growing teacher recruitment and retention crisis, emphasizing the CTF's research-driven efforts to find solutions. Additionally, she spoke about the impact of artificial intelligence on education and the need for policies that protect teachers. Closing her address, Yetman reaffirmed the CTF's commitment to international solidarity, reminding educators that collective action makes us stronger – both at home and on the global stage.

# Ontario NDP Leader Marit Stiles Thanks Catholic Teachers and Outlines a Vision for Real Investment in Schools



“I feel the energy in here,” said Ontario NDP Leader and Leader of the Official Opposition **Marit Stiles** to Catholic teachers at AGM 2025. “It gives me a lot of hope for the future and what we are going to accomplish.”

Planning an AGM around a provincial election is difficult – planning the event around a snap provincial election is near impossible.

Months ago, when the potential for an early provincial election call was still a rumour, the Association extended an invitation to the leaders of Ontario’s political parties to speak at AGM. Ontario Liberal Party Leader Bonnie Crombie and Marit Stiles were both scheduled to speak. Doug Ford never responded. In late January, Ford called a snap election, placing the election date before AGM. This shuffled schedules, and as a result only Stiles was available to speak on the Monday of AGM – though we look forward to inviting Crombie to speak to Catholic teachers in the future.

It was yet another situation created by Doug Ford – but not nearly as disastrous as the “impossible situations that Ford creates in your classrooms every day,” said Stiles to Catholic teachers. “Education is in a fragile state. Our kids are not alright. Students are struggling.”

This, described Stiles, is what she heard from families, individuals, and communities across Ontario during the election – the devastating impact of Ford’s cuts. The consequences of a government that spends more time “picking fights with teachers and education workers in its pursuit of privatization.”

While the outcome of the provincial election was not what we hoped for, as Stiles explained, there is still much to celebrate. Catholic teachers showed tremendous resolve canvassing on behalf of education-friendly candidates, knocking on doors and making phone calls, and having essential conversations about education with family, friends, and neighbours.

“Your efforts made such a difference in the election,” said Stiles. “You reminded Ontarians why publicly funded education matters so much.”

In addition to her words of thanks, she also had a challenge for Catholic teachers. “Thank you to all the teachers who did run, but I want more of you to run for office next time. We need the voice of teachers in the legislature every day, describing what is happening in our schools, and not letting this government off the hook.”

That voice – your voice – explained Stiles, is more important than ever as “our publicly funded education system is absolutely essential in building an economy and society that can stand up to the existential threat posed by Donald Trump.” Throughout her speech, and in response to questions from delegates, Stiles renewed the NDP’s commitment to publicly funded Catholic education and offered a vision for a better Ontario – starting with a real investment in schools. The NDP’s plan includes:

- Hiring more teachers and other school staff to end overcrowding in classrooms.
- Addressing the growing epidemic of violence in schools.
- Fixing our schools and addressing the repair backlog.
- Establishing a universal school nutrition program so that no child goes hungry.
- Supporting every learner – making sure that all students and teachers have the resources and supports they need to succeed.

“Our publicly funded schools are what hold our communities together,” said Stiles. “We need to stop treating education like an expense and start treating it like an investment in our future.”



## Finding Strength in Your Story: Indira Naidoo-Harris Speaks at OECTA Women's Networking Event



**Indira Naidoo-Harris** does not believe that leadership is about speaking the loudest or rising the fastest. She believes that leadership is built on resilience, purpose, and staying true to who you are – even when the world tells you not to.

This was the message she brought to the Women's Networking Event at AGM, hosted by the provincial Status of Women Committee.

Born in apartheid-era South Africa, Naidoo-Harris spoke about how her early years were shaped by injustice – and by a family that taught her to resist it. Moving to Canada as a child, she quickly learned what it meant to feel different. As a woman of colour, she explained that feeling never really went away. From a young journalist eager to make change, to a political leader breaking new ground, and now, as the Associate Vice-President of Diversity and Human Rights at the University of Guelph, Naidoo-Harris' journey was not defined by prestigious job titles, but identity. Every step of the way, she had to work harder to be heard, and even harder to be seen.

That struggle, however, is not the end of her story – and she made that clear. Her call to the women in attendance was not to push through in silence, but to advocate – for yourself, and for those

who cannot. Change, Naidoo-Harris said, “starts in rooms like this one.” In classrooms, in staff meetings, in small acts of standing up and speaking out. And it is made stronger when women support one another in the process.

The applause that followed her talk was full of understanding.

The Q&A portion of the event was an engaging discussion on everything from policy-making to self-care. When the floor opened to questions from attendees, hands were quick to rise.

One teacher asked how to navigate workplace dynamics that often sideline women's voices. Another shared her experience of being the only racialized person in her school. Others simply

wanted to say thank you for saying aloud what many experience on a daily basis.

The message throughout was clear: every story matters; and in sharing them, we begin to rewrite the systems that once left us out. She did not offer quick fixes, but rather a reminder that women in the education system, particularly those navigating multiple identities, are doing transformative work every day simply by showing up, speaking out, and refusing to shrink.

Before the evening closed, Naidoo-Harris stepped down from the stage and began making her way around the room to engage with the women in attendance. She listened as much as she spoke, stopping to chat with anyone who wanted to share a thought or ask a question. Some offered reflections, others asked how to stay hopeful in the face of burnout, and a few simply said, “I needed to hear that today.”

As the event ended, the powerful impact of Naidoo-Harris' talk was clear. Many left saying they had learned something – not just about her journey, but about their own capacity to lead, to persist, and to connect.

If the evening reminded attendees of anything, it is that the most powerful tools we have as teachers, as women, and as advocates, are our voices – and when used together, they are impossible to ignore.



# Reflections on AGM 2025: A DAB PERSPECTIVE

BY THERESE ESTACION

AGM 2025 came and went, like the big snowfall we witnessed on that cold weekend in February. It was packed and densely filled with a multitude of emotions. It was difficult, but also had its moments of celebration and connection.

For some members of the Diversity Advisory Board (DAB), it was our first time attending an AGM. For others, it was our first time speaking at the mic, an often daunting task to do in front of over 600 teachers.

More importantly, it was the very first time five members of the DAB got to vote. Being given the right to vote not only allowed the DAB an entry into the democratic process, but is symbolic of how the union space is transforming. A vote means agency. A vote means belonging. Most of all, it means self-determination in service of the collective – especially for Indigenous and equity-deserving groups. Lots to celebrate, indeed.



## Diversity Advisory Board Members: (L-R):

Aileen Santiago, Toronto Secondary; Therese Estacion, Dufferin-Peel Elementary; Tesa Fiddler, Thunder Bay Elementary; Ian Klaus Springer, Ottawa; Riva Gewarges, York; Jeffrey Goulet, Nipissing Elementary; Joshua Charpentier, Peterborough VNC; Mary-Ellen Kavanaugh, Windsor-Essex Secondary; Kathleen Brennan, Ottawa; and Allison Parsons, Dufferin-Peel Secondary

This year's AGM also saw all our resolutions pass, with minimal dissent – quite an accomplishment for the DAB. Some of the resolutions that passed included:

### Resolution 48

That Policies, Provincial Collective Bargaining, be amended by the addition of a new section to read: “General Anti-Oppression and Anti-Racism” – that the Association ensure that collective bargaining and contract negotiations use an anti-oppression and anti-racist lens to counter workplace racism and discrimination.

**Rationale:** Workplace inequities are a microcosm of broader systemic inequalities along the intersections of race, gender, disability, sex, and sexual orientation. By using an anti-oppression and anti-racist lens the Association can address issues of workplace racism and discrimination.

### Resolution 61

That the Association, through the Ontario Teachers' Federation, lobby the Ministry of Education for a return to a one-year teacher education program.

**Rationale:** The two-year program creates multiple barriers to potential teacher candidates and in particular for those from Indigenous and equity-deserving groups which has led to the current teacher shortage.

### Resolution 65

That the Association encourage local unit presidents to promote Association provided training and resources with regards to AIDE (especially around stigmatizing and discriminatory language) to their local memberships through their regular communication.

**Rationale:** It is imperative that members understand their duty of care and obligations to their students and to their colleagues. Local units can support this professional development by providing members with the resources available to them through their Association.





Therese Estacion delivers the report of the Diversity Advisory Board at AGM.

”

**It was the very first time five members of the DAB got to vote. Being given the right to vote not only allowed the DAB an entry into the democratic process, but is symbolic of how the union space is transforming.**

Other than the passing of the aforementioned resolutions, here are a couple of other AGM highlights worth sharing:

- A beautiful and touching talk, exploring his intersecting identities as a Black disabled person, by spoken word artist and filmmaker Brandon Wint.
- The largest number of Black delegates in attendance ever.
- Important member engagement in the form of questions after the Diversity Advisory Board report.

I could say more about all three highlights, but I would like to focus on the questions asked after the report. Most of us can agree that questions are important – they help inform us of what people are curious about and what they desire, and questions bring us into the intersubjective space where dialogue lives. They also hold us accountable.

Below are some of the important questions asked after the report. I share them with the purpose of preservation, but also with the purpose of perhaps letting you in on the collaborative process of culture making:

- “As noted yesterday, teacher retention rates are suffering right now. Could the Diversity Advisory Board please explain what specific steps are being taken to encourage Indigenous and/or equity-deserving groups to enter and stay in the teaching profession?”
- “Can you tell me if the Diversity Advisory Board has done any work around this, and if not, if you will be putting forth any suggestions or recommendations for the future

DAB to help our school-level leadership – even though they are not our OECTA members – to empower us to be able to bring these perspectives into our classrooms?”

- “...to what degree have there been conversations around neurodiversity among teachers and what supports have been, or could be put in place to support psychological safety so that people living with neurodivergence can actually feel comfortable asking for accommodations?”
- “My question is how do we reconcile our identities with magistral authority that directly contradicts policy proposed by the DAB?”

The importance of these questions cannot be denied, and we tried our best to answer them with the help of General Secretary David Church and Staff Officer Yvonne Runstedler. These questions will no doubt inform and guide the work of the DAB, and have highlighted the needs of our Indigenous and equity-deserving teachers that have often been marginalized or do not feel comfortable enough to stand at the mic. They also remind us of the reality of the systemic barriers and oppressive forces that members are up against.

In Solidarity.

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*Therese Estacion is a member of the Dufferin-Peel Elementary Unit and sits on the provincial Diversity Advisory Board.*

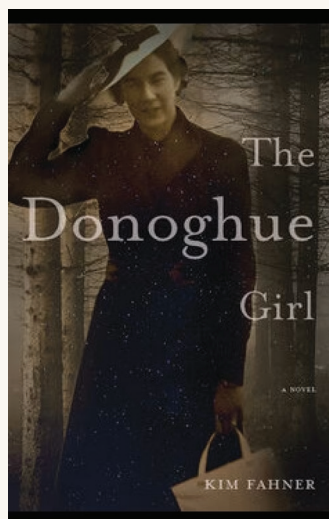
# Great Reads by Catholic Teachers

A short list of published works written by OECTA members, as explained by them.

**Kim Fahner**

*The Donoghue Girl*

Kim Fahner lives, writes, and teaches in Sudbury, Ontario. Her most recent book is a debut novel set in northern Ontario called *The Donoghue Girl*. In spring 2025, Kim's sixth book of poems, *The Pollination Field*, is being published by Turnstone Press in Winnipeg. Recently, Kim was awarded first place in The Ampersand Review's 2024 Essay Writing Contest, second place in Prairie Fire's 2023 McNally Robinson Bookseller Creative Nonfiction Award, and she was a finalist for The Fiddlehead's 2023 Ralph Gustafson Poetry Prize. From 2016 to 2018, Kim was Poet Laureate for the City of Greater Sudbury. She is currently the First Vice-Chair of the Writers' Union of Canada and may be reached via her author website at [kimfahner.com](http://kimfahner.com).



*The Donoghue Girl* is set in Creighton, a mining town that once existed on the outskirts of Sudbury. It's based on a family rumour and is partially rooted in my maternal family's history. It's set in the late 1930s, just before WWII and on the cusp of Finland's Winter War. My new book of poems, *The Pollination Field*, is a collection of 'bee poems' that speaks to the importance of bees (and other pollinators) to the balance of the natural world.

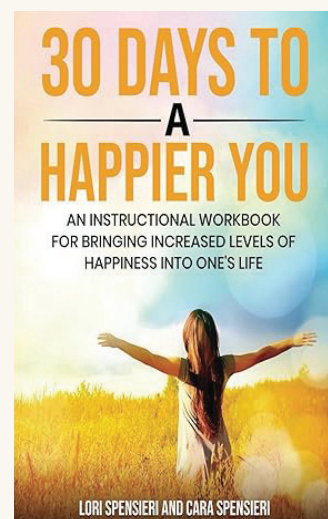
*The Pollination Field* also features a series of mythopoetic tales that are told from the feminist perspective of various 'queen bee' figures that symbolize a woman's transformation through her lifetime.

Click **HERE**  
to purchase  
*The Donoghue Girl*

**Lori Spensieri**

*30 Days to a Happier You*

Lori Spensieri is a passionate author, wellness advocate, and happiness coach with over 17 years of experience as a teacher with the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Currently serving as the chaplain at St. John Paul II Secondary, Lori is dedicated to spreading love, positivity, and emotional well-being to students, staff, and beyond. Through their debut book, *30 Days to a Happier You*, Lori offers practical tools to help readers cultivate happiness, resilience, and a more positive outlook on life. When not teaching or writing, Lori enjoys spending time with their partner and two children, leading workshops, guiding individuals through the 60-Day Happiness Challenge, and finding moments of reflection and connection with nature.



*30 Days to a Happier You* is a guided workbook designed to help you find more happiness and mindfulness in just 30 days. Each day introduces a simple method to boost your well-being, with information, small tasks, and a space to reflect on your results. At the end of the 30 days, you will use your recorded feedback to create a personalized happiness plan that works best for you. It's an easy, practical way to build a more joyful and mindful life that can be maintained over time! I wrote this book because I've always felt that happiness is often overlooked as a priority in our lives. Many people mistakenly believe that happiness will come as a byproduct of achieving a goal or completing a task.

However, the truth is, anyone has the power to choose happiness in the present moment. Small moments of joy are easy to create, and happiness is within reach at any time.

Click **HERE**  
to purchase  
*30 Days to  
a Happier You*



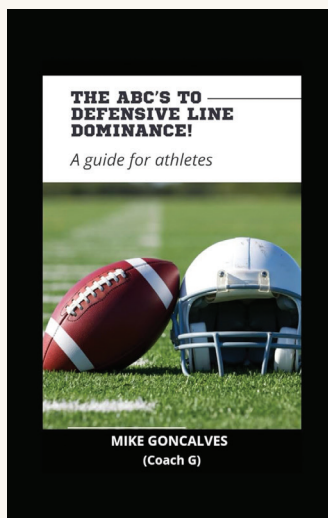


## Michael Goncalves

### *The ABC's to Defensive Line Dominance!*

Michael Goncalves is the author of three books centering around leadership, perseverance, and the beautiful game of football. Michael is currently a special education resource teacher and defensive line coach at St. Roch CSS, which won the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) championship in late November. He lives in Mississauga with his wife and three children, or as he calls them, his home team! His football career has spanned many levels including high school, summer football with the Ontario Varsity Football League, university teams, Team Canada, and the Canadian Football League with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats.

Click **HERE**  
to purchase  
*The ABC's to  
Defensive Line  
Dominance!*



*The ABC'S to Defensive Line Dominance! A Guide for Athletes* breaks down essential skills, explosive movements, and dynamic strategies to take your defensive line play to the next level. Coach G provides a defensive scheme that attacks the offense, dictates gameplay, and creates multiple opportunities to win in all three phases – offense, defense, and special teams! Lastly, this playbook allows coaches to implement a defensive system to eliminate an opponent's best players while grabbing flags, dropping into coverage, and following proper rush lanes to the quarterback!

My inspiration, in all things, is my family. With the knowledge obtained over the last thirty years, I had to finally put pen to paper. Sharing the wisdom that I received from some truly remarkable people, has been, and continues to be, an immense joy! My parents, wife, children, mentors, coaches, close friends, and just a collective of great human beings; they have inspired me to continue writing, make connections, and spread knowledge to others!

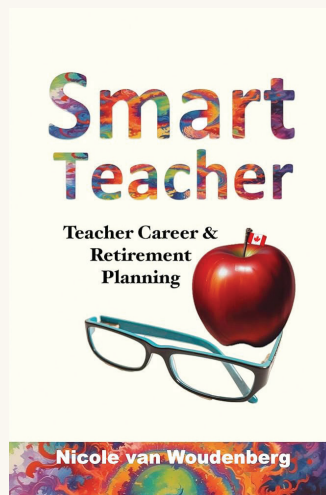
## Nicole van Woudenberg

### *Smart Teacher*

Nicole van Woudenberg is an award-winning educator with over 25 years of experience. A dedicated teacher, Nicole served on her local executive for more than a decade, chaired the Provincial Educational Aid Committee, and participated in Project Overseas. Nicole's passion for writing, sparked by her high school teacher, grew throughout her career and led to her becoming a published author.

Curious about retirement plans after attending several colleagues' retirement parties, she found a lack of Canadian resources focused on holistic retirement planning. This inspired her to create and host the *85 After School* podcast (available on Apple and Spotify), where retired Canadian teachers share insights, passions, and second careers. Nicole now develops innovative resources to help teachers in their classrooms, which are available through the *85 After School* website and social media.

Click **HERE**  
to purchase  
*Smart Teacher*



*Smart Teacher* offers a holistic approach to retirement, focusing on shaping a fulfilling, purposeful life and not just calculating your financial status. It guides you to explore your passions, reflect on your health, and understand your changing identity after years of work. Once you know who you are beyond your job, you'll think about nurturing relationships and developing new ones.

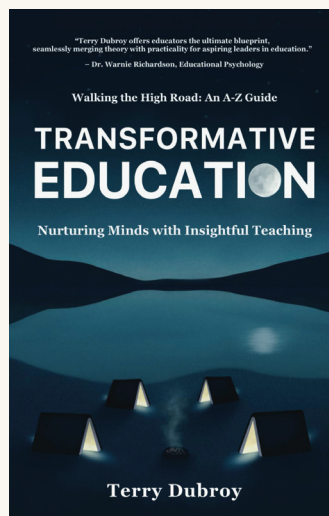
While finances are important, this guide encourages reflection and deliberate planning at your own pace. With 52 low-cost or free activities for your first year of retirement, this book helps you embrace your new freedom and enjoy every moment.

## Terry Dubroy

### *Transformative Education*

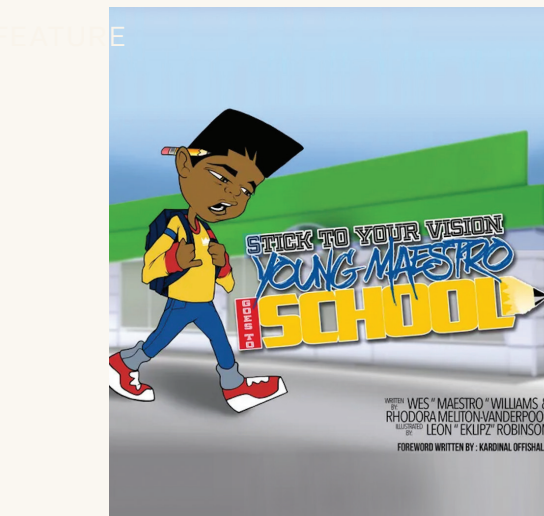
Terry Dubroy is a Catholic teacher, adventurer, and passionate storyteller whose 3,500 kilometre canoe and kayaking trips have shaped his unique perspective on education. Drawing inspiration from his early days as a wilderness guide in Algonquin Park, he has crafted a body of work that intertwines lessons of leadership, authenticity, and nature, with the transformative power of experiential learning.

As the author of *Transformative Education: Nurturing Minds With Insightful Teaching*, Terry channels over three decades of hands-on experience in interdisciplinary education, leadership training, and outdoor adventure facilitation, into narratives that inspire educators to break free of convention and create engaging, student-centred learning environments where everyone can thrive. Terry's passion for leadership development led him to found Thrive: Enabling Potential (enablingpotential.ca), where his dynamic approach and natural leadership shine through at conferences, workshops, and retreats. Through insightful storytelling, he continues to challenge and motivate those seeking to become transformative educators.



*Transformative Education: Nurturing Minds with Insightful Teaching* draws on decades of experiences and lessons learned, both in and out of the classroom, to guide educators at all levels in creating meaningful, engaging, and student-centred learning experiences. Inspired by my journey from a struggling student to a dedicated teacher, this book invites educators to see themselves as catalysts for positive change in their classrooms and to foster authenticity, connection, and lifelong learning in their students. It offers practical strategies for educators to integrate their strengths into their teaching methodology and to navigate the ever-evolving educational landscape with confidence.

Click [HERE](#)  
to purchase  
*Transformative Education*



## Rhodora Meliton-Vanderpool

### *Stick to Your Vision: Young Maestro Goes to School*

Rhodora Meliton-Vanderpool is a passionate Catholic teacher, speaker, and advocate with over 25 years of experience in education. Based in Rexdale, Toronto, she focuses on equity, community building, and culturally responsive teaching.

Beyond the classroom, she's active in music, mentorship, and leadership roles – currently serving as Vice-President of Artist Management at New Level Artist Development Inc. Rhodora has been recognized for her innovation and impact, including a nomination for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Rhodora co-authored *Stick to Your Vision: Young Maestro Goes to School* with Juno Lifetime Achievement Award winner Wes "Maestro" Williams. Her second book, *Ajay's Dreams*, co-written with DJ Charlie B (Ajay Saxena), continues this mission of uplifting youth by showcasing stories rooted in culture, dreams, and music.

*Stick to Your Vision: Young Maestro Goes to School* tells the story of a young boy growing up in Toronto who discovers the power of writing and hip hop through mentorship, family support, and inspiring teachers. It highlights themes of creativity, identity, mentorship, and the positive influence of education—drawing directly from Wes' real-life journey.

Both books aim to empower young readers, especially those from underrepresented communities, to believe in their potential and use their voices to shape their futures.

Click [HERE](#)  
to purchase  
*Stick to Your Vision: Young Maestro Goes to School*



# Lessons from CSW69

## A Personal Reflection on Progress, Challenges, and the Path Forward



BY CAROLINE CHIKOORE

The 69<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) in New York was a powerful reminder of both the progress made and the challenges that remain in the fight for justice. Held from March 10 to 21, the session reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, a landmark declaration adopted in 1995 to advance gender equality and women's empowerment globally.

A six-member OECTA delegation arrived on March 10, shortly after our 2025 Annual General Meeting. As I immersed myself in discussions, debates, and presentations, I reflected not just on policies and resolutions, but also on the broader implications for our collective journey toward justice and equity.



*(L-R): Diana Corazza, Third Vice-President on the Provincial Executive; Tesa Fiddler, representative on the Diversity Advisory Board; Melissa Cowan, Staff Officer liaison to the provincial Status of Women Committee; Mary Lachapelle, Deputy General Secretary; Melissa Garrett, Councillor on the Provincial Executive; Caroline Chikore, AIDE lead at Provincial Office.*

### Defending Equity in a Time of Backlash

CSW69 was both a beacon of progress and a battleground for justice. Regressive governments and organizations are actively seeking to undermine hard-won gains, challenging the use of the term “gender,” reproductive rights, protections against gender-based violence, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Particularly concerning was the American administration’s rollback on diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and initiatives.

In Canada, the urgency of this fight became clear when Prime Minister Mark Carney eliminated key equity and inclusion roles from the Liberal cabinet, including the Minister for Women and Gender Equality; the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities; and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Labour. This decision was a stark reminder that progress is never guaranteed – it must be defended, strengthened, and relentlessly advanced. In response, both the OECTA and Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) delegations swiftly condemned the move, reaffirming their commitment to equity and inclusion.



### Key Discussions and Insights

Despite these challenges, CSW69 was a space of resilience, strategy, and forward-thinking dialogue. The most pressing discussions included:

#### 1. Women's Economic Empowerment

Economic justice was a central theme, emphasizing the need for gender-responsive policies that promote fair wages, decent work, and the elimination of workplace discrimination. Inclusive workplaces were framed not just as a moral imperative but as an economic necessity.

#### 2. Care Work and Social Protection

Care work – often invisible and undervalued – was recognized as fundamental to economic and social well-being. There was strong advocacy for social protection systems that compensate care work and support families, ensuring that economies recognize the true value of caregiving.

#### 3. Intersectionality and Feminist Leadership

CSW69 underscored the importance of intersectional feminism, recognizing that discrimination is compounded by race, gender identity, class, disability, and other factors. Calls for intergenerational leadership and solidarity resonated deeply, reinforcing the need to amplify young feminist voices.

#### 4. The Power of Data for Gender Equality

A “whole-of-society approach” to data collection was emphasized, urging governments, research institutions, businesses, and community organizations to collaborate in gathering gender-sensitive data. Without robust and inclusive data, policy implementation risks being

ineffective and detached from real-world experiences.

### Looking Ahead: Key Takeaways

CSW69 reinforced that while global commitments to gender equality exist, real progress requires tangible action. Key lessons include:

- Gender equality demands continuous advocacy to counter opposition from conservative forces.
- Intersectionality must remain central – one-size-fits-all solutions fail marginalized groups.
- Concrete policies on care work and social protection are crucial for economic justice.
- Technology and artificial intelligence must be leveraged to close equity gaps rather than entrench them.
- CSW itself faces significant challenges, including funding shortages, limited civil society participation, and weak enforcement mechanisms. The CLC is coordinating efforts to revive the UN Commission on the Status of Women through policy recommendations.

### Personal Reflections

One of the most inspiring moments for me was the virtual presentation by OECTA's Sharon Giroux and Tesa Fiddler. Their session, Ontario's Catholic Educators: Upholding the Rights of Indigenous and Other Equity-Deserving Peoples, was a powerful testament to the role educators play in advancing social justice. Their stories and insights reinforced why this work matters.

Another powerful moment was learning about the advocacy work of disabled women in Africa, who are integrating an intersectional and diversity, equity, and inclusion lens into their activism. Their stories highlighted how these frameworks are essential for advancing women's rights globally.

### Moving Forward with Hope and Determination

Leaving CSW69, I felt both frustration and hope – frustration at the forces seeking to reverse progress but hope in the strength and determination of those fighting for justice. The road ahead is not easy, but it is necessary.

As co-attendee Mary Lachapelle, OECTA Deputy General Secretary, aptly pointed out, “If women succeed, so does everyone else.” That statement underlines the importance of these continued dialogues and the necessity that this work translates to further progress in our locals all around the world.

The most important lesson from CSW69? Gender equality is not just a policy goal; it is a lived reality we must create, protect, and sustain every day.

As I return to my work in accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity, I carry with me the voices, experiences, and wisdom shared at CSW69. The fight continues, but so does our unwavering commitment to a just and equitable future.

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*Caroline Chikore is the Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (AIDE) Lead at the OECTA Provincial Office.*



# Professional Misconduct and the Rights of Equity-deserving Students in Catholic Schools

BY YVONNE RUNSTEDLER AND BELINDA RUSSO

It is no secret that we are currently living in a time of political and philosophical polarization. Flag protocols, library resources, and student dress code policies all once considered benign have become the flashpoints in ongoing conflicts related to accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE). This context has a direct impact on the classroom, leaving many teachers to wonder where their professional obligations rest, especially as they face publicly-debated topics. Some of the public conversations, and political movements within Canada and beyond, address the limitation of freedoms of many groups, perhaps most notably 2SLGBTQIA+ identified people. This context necessitates a review of the professional role of teachers and their legal and professional duties as they relate to equity-deserving students.

## Legal Context

First and foremost, the law protects a student's right to an education without discrimination. Teachers have a legal and moral obligation to uphold their students' rights under Part 1 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. This code includes protections on the following enumerated grounds:

- Citizenship
- Race
- Place of origin
- Ethnic origin
- Colour
- Ancestry
- Disability
- Age
- Creed
- Sex/pregnancy
- Family status
- Marital status
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Gender expression
- Receipt of public assistance (in housing)
- Record of offenses (in employment)

The Ontario College of Teachers' (OCT) Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession reminds teachers to engage with each student, regardless of identity, with care, respect, trust, and integrity. **There is no exception, regardless of the publicly-funded school system.** In fact, in November 2020, the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* was amended to include 'hatred' under the professional misconduct regulation, and defined hatred as;

"Making remarks or engaging in behaviours that expose any person or class of persons to hatred on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination under Part I of the *Human Rights Code*."

The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed and reaffirmed that expectations for teacher behaviour are higher than the general public in three foundational cases: *Ross v. New Brunswick*, *R. v. Audet*, and the *Toronto (City) Board of Education v. OSSTF District 15*. In summary, the decisions of the justices in each case affirm that:

- The broader community sees you as a teacher regardless of where they encounter you, so your conduct will be judged as if you are in the classroom.
- As a teacher, you have been entrusted with the care of your students. You must provide that care as a parent would.
- Teachers hold an extremely important position in society. You must maintain a higher standard of conduct.

These expectations are in place in the classroom, outside of the classroom, in person, and online. Your behaviour across your relationships (in person and online) can be under scrutiny given this legal context.

All teachers in Ontario operate under the jurisdiction of the OCT. The OCT investigates and considers cases "on the balance of probabilities" to determine if professional misconduct has occurred. In OCT investigations, members found to have engaged in racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination have been found guilty of professional misconduct and have been subject to discipline. To illustrate, the quotations that follow are taken from recent OCT decisions in professional misconduct cases related to discrimination.

Topic	OCT Findings
<b>Homophobia, Transphobia</b>	Teachers are expected to be inclusive and respectful towards students. Expressing homophobic and transphobic beliefs in class is discriminatory and offensive, particularly towards homosexual and transgender students. The Member's conduct therefore amounts to verbal abuse of a student. (OCT Case, 2022)
<b>Sexism, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation</b>	The Panel found that the Member psychologically or emotionally abused students, contrary to subsection 1(7.2) of Ontario Regulation 437/97. When the Member delivered a speech to students, the member shared personal views that there was 'proper masculine behaviour' and that men should work in gender-appropriate occupations, stand at the head of the household and protect their future wives. The Member's comments made both male and female students feel upset and invalidated. The Member's intolerance degraded students, their future aspirations and their gender identities. It disregarded the realities of students who identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community and disrespected them and their lived experiences. Given the negative impact that the Member's comments had on students' psychological or emotional well-being, the Panel finds that the Member's conduct was psychologically or emotionally abusive. (OCT Case, 2022)
<b>Racism</b>	Using racial slurs and making derogatory comments when addressing students is offensive and suggests that people of colour are intellectually and culturally inferior and unworthy. Such comments amount to verbal abuse of students. Given the power that teachers hold in a classroom and the fact that such power can maintain and perpetuate a colonial culture and oppressive approaches, the Member's conduct would reasonably have had adverse psychological or emotional impacts on students, particularly those of colour. (OCT Case, 2022)
<b>Ableism</b>	It has also been shown that the Member failed to modify their teaching to meet the needs of students with an IEP, for example, in the case of Student 1. According to testimony, the Member had a professional responsibility to adapt their teaching to an individual student's needs and the accommodations in their IEP. The Panel thus finds that the Member did not meet the standard of practice for assessments and curriculum compliance. (OCT Case, 2022)

In the cases above, the OCT ordered:

- Suspensions of members' teaching certificates
- The members take remedial courses related to the discriminatory items in their case
- The judgement be posted on their individual OCT page

Finally, all teachers have a duty of care toward their students, which includes duties to report under the *Child, Youth, and Family Services Act*. If you suspect that a child is at risk of harm, you are personally responsible for reporting this to your local Children's Aid Society (CAS). For example, should you believe that a student who is 2SLGBTQIA+ is experiencing abuse from one of their caregivers because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other reason, then the onus is on you to report this to your local CAS. Neglecting to report when a child may be at risk or has been harmed could lead to allegations of professional misconduct.



### What does this mean for me as a Catholic teacher?

Some Catholic teachers suggest that their personal interpretations of the Catholic faith are examples of denominational rights and/or personal freedom of thought, belief, and opinion protected by section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It is important to take a moment to clarify these rights.

**Catholic denominational rights under the law are not held by individual teachers.** Rather, denominational rights in Ontario are held by the Roman Catholic supporters in a district represented by the local Roman Catholic District School Board. This allows Catholic school boards to preferentially hire Catholic staff, use religious iconography, and maintain the Catholicity of the schools. Individuals within schools may have different views on what it means to be Catholic, but it is the school board's responsibility to determine how its staff will exemplify Catholic values within their school community. Your personal understanding of Catholicism may differ from that of your employer and your local diocese. However, as a teacher, you have an obligation to follow the direction of your employer, who holds the constitutionally protected denominational rights, which includes the right to manage and control the schools to protect and preserve the Catholicity of the system. Once again, it is the school board that determines how Catholicity will be maintained in the system and not the teachers. On the other hand, in exercising these denominational rights, the school board must ensure that it is also complying with the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

It is no secret that we live in a world of varied opinions. Likewise, teachers are teachers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the legal obligations outlined above are in place at all times. If you have questions about your role as a teacher responsive to students in your care, you can review the resources listed and/or reach out to your local unit president.



### OECTA's resources

Click **HERE** to access the following resources:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ and Coming Out
- AIDE and Catholicism: A Backgrounder
- Your Professional Boundaries: Understanding the Impact of the N-Word in Catholic Schools

Click **HERE** to access:

- Catholic Teachers' Safer Spaces Series: Safer Spaces? Braver Spaces? – Our Collective Responsibility

Click **HERE** to access:

- Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Text and Video Resources

Yvonne Runstedler and Belinda Russo are Staff Officers in the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office.

# Living Our Faith with Hope

BY SIMON DALLIMORE



**I**t was wonderful to be able to celebrate Mass at AGM with over 600 people early Sunday morning. I left the celebration with a renewed sense of hope. Father Michael Lehman energized the room with his positive message, confirming God's love for all of us. His message was one of hope, unity, and love; love that we receive from God and love that we show our students, each other, and our neighbours.

Father Lehman also reminded us that 2025 is a Jubilee Year and Pope Francis has set the theme for the year as 'Pilgrims of Hope.' The theme calls for us to have and bring the message of hope to all people. The Pilgrims of Hope theme fits in very nicely with the message of Lent.

Listening to Father Lehman's words, I was reminded that Lent is also a time for hope, and provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our faith as we prepare for Easter. It is a time to renew our commitment to God and to consider how we live our faith on a daily basis. This year in particular, it seems that we are constantly confronted with judgement, hate, and division. It can be difficult to feel hope at times – but through our faith there is always a way. As part of my personal reflection during Lent, I turn to 1 Corinthians 13, which

highlights the importance of faith, hope, and love (which is why it shows up at countless weddings). The chapter ends with the reminder, "these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith, hope, and love. Strong words that we can use to guide us and help us to live our faith.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). To love our neighbour is to love, not judge or condemn, all people. Love provides hope not just for ourselves, but for our neighbours. Love is a large part of how we should live our faith. As people of faith, we are called to love God and to treat our neighbour the way we treat ourselves.

For me, living our faith is something that should be part of everything we do. It should be a faith that is lived and expressed through our daily actions. We can turn to the message in Matthew 6 as a basis for how we are called to live our faith. Jesus tells us, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). This, Jesus

explains, is to be done for prayer, fasting, and acts of charity. We are called to live our faith quietly and avoid the open displays that are designed more for show than anything else.

If we live our faith with love, we bring hope to those around us. Listening to Father Lehman during Mass, my sense of hope was refreshed. If we live our faith with love for one another, then there is hope for the future. Love can give others hope. Love helps to ground us in a world that seems full of hate and division. As teachers, we approach our job with love. We treat our students with love, and we give our students hope.

My hope was reinvigorated not just during Mass at AGM, but also when listening to the debates at the microphones and hearing greater support for accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity. Living our faith with love allows us to be more inclusive in the face of conflict, division, and hate. I appreciated the opportunity to celebrate Mass with so many people at AGM, and for the opportunity to share in the hope that I see within the Association.

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# Building Your Mental Hygiene Routines

BY SIMON DALLIMORE

We are in the final stretch of this school year. March break is behind us, the daylight hours are getting longer, and there is warmth in the sun again. The first few bulbs are even starting to poke their head through in my front garden. For many, spring brings with it a renewed sense of hope.

Despite the feeling of hope, we still need to pay attention to our mental well-being. The last few months of school bring their own stressors, stemming from both the classroom and our own personal lives. We need to pay attention to these stressors and how we respond to them.

Many people struggle with their mental wellness at some point. We cannot always be 'up.' We need to remember that mental wellness, like our physical wellness, is on a continuum, and requires our constant attention.

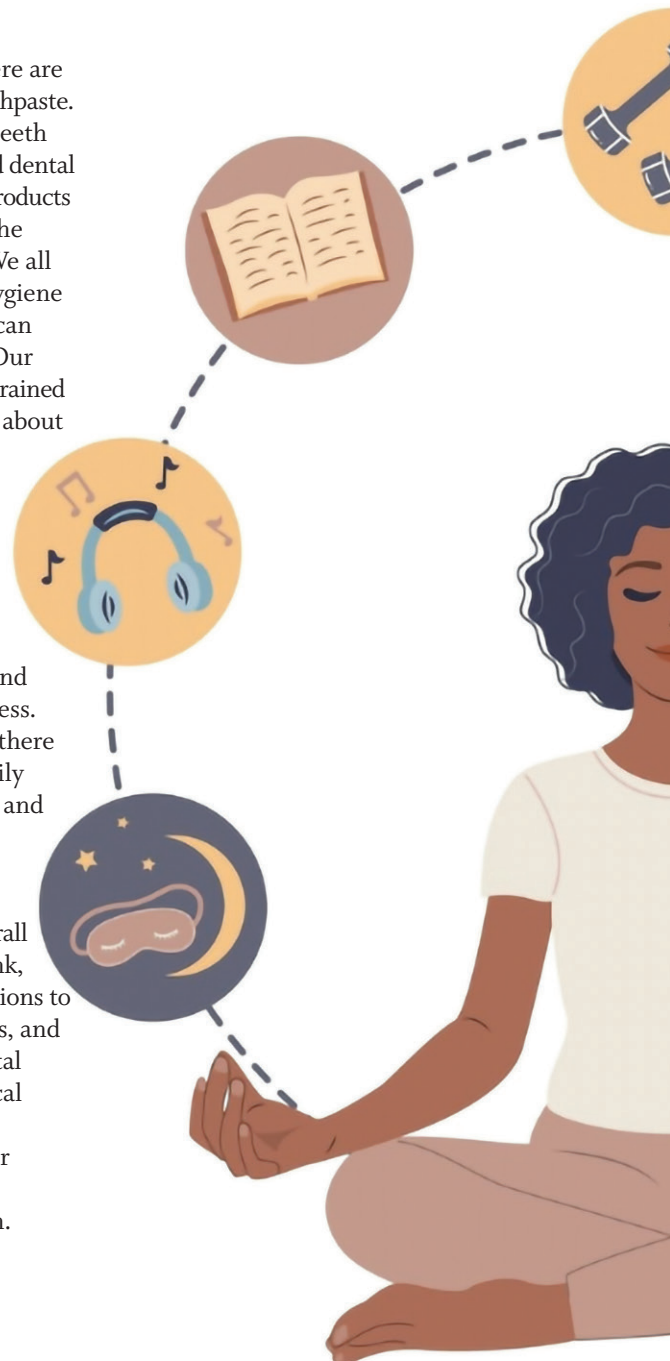
**It is important to remember that Mental Wellness is different from Mental Illness. Mental Illness refers to diagnosed disorders that require medical attention. While mental wellness is on a continuum and there are things that we can do to improve our overall wellness, mental illness requires medical attention that goes beyond mental hygiene.**

It struck me the other day that there are a lot of commercials on TV for toothpaste. We all learn early on that regular teeth cleaning and flossing make for good dental hygiene. Next comes the skin care products and deodorants, reminding us of the importance of personal hygiene. We all know that attention to personal hygiene is good for our overall health and can help stave off illness and disease. Our personal hygiene routines are so ingrained in us that we do not need to think about doing them.

Good self-care also includes mental hygiene, which is not often talked about or promoted.

Mental hygiene refers to the daily activities we can do that support and maintain mental health and wellness. Just like with our physical health, there are small things that we can do daily to help keep up our mental health and wellness – most of which are also good for our physical well-being.

Your mental health affects your overall health. It plays a role in how we think, behave, and feel. It drives our reactions to stress, how we interact with others, and how we get through our day. Mental health concerns show up in physical symptoms and impact our overall physical health. Mental hygiene, or mental self-care, is an important consideration in our overall health.



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## Focusing on self care may seem like a luxury, but it is important to take some time to develop our mental hygiene routines.



The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) views self-care as making time to do things that improve both our physical and mental health. The July 2024 CMHA article “Self-care simplified: Why it’s essential and how to make it happen” suggests that while self-care looks different for each individual and may be considered a luxury, studies suggest, “regular, quality, self-care has been shown to improve mental health, enhance self-esteem and self-worth, increase optimism, and lessen symptoms of anxiety and depression. It can also help build resilience so you’re better able to handle life’s many stressors and challenges.”

How you care for yourself will be based on your own preferences, needs, and lifestyle and will look different for different people. However, even doing small things for yourself can have large impacts on your overall well-being. The CMHA article also suggests a number of things that you might try – daily activities you could incorporate that bring you joy.

Daily physical exercise, maintaining a healthy, nutritious diet, getting enough sleep, meditating, or journaling are all activities that could form the basis of a daily mental hygiene routine. During the workday, it is important to take short

breaks and, if possible, step outside and just take a couple of minutes to reconnect with the world (leave your phone behind, pause, and look and listen to the world around you). Can you find a few minutes in your day to do something that you enjoy doing, like a hobby, reading, or anything else that brings you joy?

Breathing exercises have also been shown to help calm people during stressful situations and can also form part of a mental hygiene routine. Taking a few minutes to practice different breathing exercises could help reduce your overall stress levels and provide you with an effective tool when you find yourself in a stressful situation. Starling Minds offers different resources, training, and exercises you can do that include various breathing techniques. It is a free website offered through OTIP. You can also access different resources in the Member Mental Health and Wellness section at [catholicteachers.ca](https://catholicteachers.ca).

Our lives are busy and the last few months of the school year bring their own challenges. Focusing on yourself may seem like a luxury, but it is important to take some time to develop and start implementing your mental hygiene routines so they become as automatic as brushing your teeth.

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*Illustration: From the CMHA article: “Self-care simplified: Why it’s essential and how to make it happen.”*



# GOING *Through the Motions*

BY MICHELLE DESPAULT

**L**ike many people, I am a creature of habit. I like to do the same things in the same way and my day is filled with little routines, like my morning getting ready routine and my bedtime routine. My routines are the intentional stringing together of habits that work to keep me on track, keep me focused, and help me get through the day. But lately I have become aware of how much my whole life feels routine. Wake up, work, have dinner, work some more, go to bed, do it all again the next day. Wash, rinse, repeat. I am going through the same day, living the same week, over and over again. Time is speeding by. The days are blurring together, and with the exception of a vacation or special event here and there, there is not much to really distinguish one year from another; and I know I am not alone in this experience.

Many of us, whether we want to admit it or not, are in a rut. Going through the motions of our lives, checking the boxes, but not really experiencing life. It is like we are on autopilot or sleepwalking through our lives. We are struggling with a lack of passion and joy for our lives.

If you feel like you are just going through the motions of your life right now, here are a few suggestions on how to disrupt this pattern and bring more joy into your days.

**Shake things up** – Try doing something different from your norm. If you always hit up the same coffee shop or sandwich place for lunch, try going somewhere different. Bonus points for supporting a Canadian-owned franchise or a locally-owned and run establishment. If you always order the same thing off the menu, try something different. Do you take the same route to and from work each day? Try a different route or just pass down a couple different streets. Even if it adds more time to your commute, it will expand your horizons and maybe you will see an interesting shop or park you did not notice before. Do you save all your 'fun' activities for the weekend? Try having your date night on a Wednesday or hit up cheap movie night on Tuesday. The point is to be intentional about making a different choice for yourself instead of the same old same old you typically engage in.

**Try something new** – We are all creatures of habit to some extent and trying new things can feel like too much effort for too little reward. It also pushes the boundaries of our comfort zone – a place we never want to leave but also a place that prevents us from expanding our horizons. For the better part of 30 years I was a 'heck no' to playing golf – mostly because I was horrible at it, but also because I felt it was too long and slow! A few years ago, my girlfriends and I went to a 'ladies try golf' night with Golf Ontario and we had the best time! I never would have predicted how much fun I had, especially because I loathed the sport for most of my life. I said yes because I did not want to be left out, but also because I know that there is growth and unexpected reward in setting aside my judgement and trying new things from a place of no expectations. Golfing is now an activity I look forward to doing every year with friends and colleagues. Other new things that are on my to-do list include taking a cooking class, learning to do a 'hockey stop' on ice skates, going salsa dancing, and axe throwing. Come up with your own list of new or different things you would like to try and plan to do one new thing each month.

## Start looking at how you can disrupt your routines and start bringing little hits of joy into your daily life.

**Don't wait** – My closet is full of clothes, jewelry, and perfume that I almost never wear because I am saving them for a special occasion – except special occasions are few and far between these days and these items I love are wasting away in my closet when I could be enjoying them. Like me, I am sure you have many things that you have purchased or received over the years that are collecting dust. I call this delaying happiness. When something brings you joy, you should wear it, use it, appreciate it now instead of some hypothetical time in the future. A few years ago, my husband and I decided to start using the 'good dishes' we were gifted with at our wedding on a daily basis. Over the 20 plus years that we had those dishes, we probably pulled them out maybe six times.

What were we really waiting for? Why was everyday not an opportunity to eat on dishes that were not scratched and mismatched? Why could we not enjoy 'good' things on the daily? If you have things in your life that you are saving for some future date, start enjoying them now. Wear your dressier clothes to work, use your good dishes, and treat every day like a special occasion.

Start looking at how you can disrupt your routines and start bringing little hits of joy into your daily life. A vacation or special event is great and memorable, but finding ways to increase the joy in your everyday experience of life is key to moving from mundane to motivating.

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



**ROUTINE**

# Ford, Tariffs, and Snow – Oh My!

## Thoughts on the Snap Provincial Election

BY FILOMENA FERRARO

**T**he 2025 Ontario provincial election held on February 27, resulted in a victory for Premier Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, securing a third consecutive majority government with 80 out of 124 seats. This marks the first time since 1959 that an Ontario premier has achieved such a feat.

Premier Ford called an unnecessary snap election more than a year ahead of schedule, citing the need for a strong mandate to address the looming threat of U.S. President Donald Trump's proposed 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian goods. These tariffs pose a significant risk to Ontario's manufacturing sector, and Ford positioned himself as a defender of the country's economic interests.

This election was also called during a period of uncertainty at the federal level, following Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's resignation and the impending Federal Liberal Party leadership race in early March. While Ford's campaign slogan – *Canada is Not for Sale* – resonated with some Ontarians, many felt he overstepped his role as Premier. This perception, along with other factors, may have contributed to the PC Party of Ontario falling short of its goal of winning between 90 to 100 seats.

### Why Call an Early Election?

A major question among Ontarians was: why call an early election at all? Ford's government already held a majority, and he had no direct power to counter Trump's tariffs alone.

Rumors of an early election began circulating in May 2024, and Ford never denied them. He insisted that Trump's tariff threats justified the \$189 million election expense, arguing that he needed a renewed mandate. However, many suspected that his real motives were to get ahead of:

- The RCMP's release of findings on the Greenbelt scandal
- A potential federal election victory for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) under Pierre Poilievre
- The rising popularity of the Ontario Liberal Party (OLP) under Bonnie Crombie

### Campaign Dynamics

Throughout the campaign, Ford emphasized his commitment to opposing U.S. tariffs and protecting Ontario's economy. He actively engaged with U.S. lawmakers, including making visits to Washington to lobby against the proposed levies. This raised questions about how he was allowed to represent Ontario while actively campaigning. Opposition parties filed a complaint with the ethics commissioner, but no action was taken. While some Ontarians expressed concern, it was not enough to derail Ford's campaign.

Unfortunately, the focus on international trade overshadowed pressing domestic issues, including challenges in healthcare, housing affordability, and controversial land development policies. Much like in 2022, Ford's simple campaign strategy either secured his win or contributed to voter apathy.

### Opposition Parties' Performance

The New Democratic Party (NDP), led by Marit Stiles, secured 27 seats, maintaining its role as the Official Opposition despite a decline in representation. Many of the party's seats were at risk, but the NDP's strong campaign and ground game helped retain its core voter base.

The Ontario Liberal Party (OLP), under Bonnie Crombie, made gains by winning 14 seats, regaining official party status for the first time since 2018. However, Crombie suffered a personal loss, failing to win a seat for herself. Ford's team launched relentless attack ads against her and her campaign failed to gain momentum, echoing former Liberal leader Steven Del Duca's 2022 defeat.

The OLP's platform focused on healthcare, public safety, and affordable housing, but many felt it lacked a strong stance on the tariff war and Ontario's healthcare crisis.





## We must continue advocating for our schools, our students, and our communities both in public discourse and at the ballot box.

### Voter Turnout Déjà-vu

Voter turnout saw a slight increase, with approximately 45.4 per cent of eligible Ontarians casting ballots compared to 44.06 per cent in 2022. However, logistical challenges persisted:

- Voting stations were understaffed
- Advance polling days were reduced from 10 to 3
- Many voters did not receive their voter cards

These issues led to accusations of voter suppression, though the jury is still out on whether it was intentional.

Despite these obstacles, OECTA member engagement and activism were impressive, particularly given the tight timelines and harsh snowy winter conditions. It is an indication that as an Association we are moving in the right the direction.

### A Glass-half-full Perspective

As one of my esteemed colleagues put it, it's best to take a glass-half-full approach to this election and there are good reasons to do so.

From an organizational standpoint, engagement among our members was stronger than in past elections, despite the challenging conditions. Over the past year, we held five election readiness training sessions, where hundreds of members from across the province discussed election issues like mapping techniques, community building, get-out-the-vote strategies, polling and research, telling their story, having effective conversations, and canvassing.

Approximately 25 canvassing events were organized, bringing out many first-time canvassers. Candidates joined in, alongside OECTA's President and First Vice-President. This effort was noticed not only by the public but also by political parties and the broader labour community.

We also saw three PC-held ridings flip to the OLP in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Ajax, and Nepean, as well as a key win in Don Valley North with the OLP picking up that riding previously held by an independent. While we fell short in many ridings, these shifts indicate that Ford's hold is weakening in several communities.

### Moving Forward

With Ford's focus shifting away from public services and social policies, polling suggests Ontarians are now most concerned about tariffs, economic stability, and job security.

Meanwhile, opposition parties face the challenge of rebuilding and redefining their value and priorities. The NDP's reduced seat count and the Liberals' ongoing recovery signal an evolving political landscape.

As an Association, we must continue fostering political engagement at the local level. Consistently, polling shows that the public views teachers, not politicians, as the most credible experts in publicly funded education. We must continue advocating for our schools, our students, and our communities in public discourse throughout the coming years, not just in the lead-up to the next provincial election.

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# Nice T-Shirt

By Gian Marcon



The first concert tee I purchased, commemorating Bruce Springsteen's 1977 visit to Maple Leaf Gardens, is still a valued piece of my personal history. I dig out that black T-shirt occasionally and reminisce about that event and how it fed my intense fandom. Those early band T-shirts often reflected the identity of the wearer who wanted others to know that they identified with the musical artist they were wearing. The T-shirts were relatively affordable, and for many of us growing up in Toronto, often purchased from a stall at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) or a sketchy shop on Yonge Street. So, when I recently saw that a luxury retailer was selling reproduction Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix T-shirts for \$175.00 a piece, the extent to which things had changed struck me.

While attending the 2025 OECTA AGM Awards celebration, I was impressed by the level of sartorial resplendence reflected in the reception hall. As an invited guest, I made every effort to fit in albeit with moderate success. After the evening event concluded, however, I quickly changed out of my jacket, dress shirt, and tie into something a little more compatible with the informal socializing that ensued. For me, that entailed donning one of my many T-shirts. Anyone who knows me can attest to the fact that T-shirts have become a bit of a signature fashion choice of mine and of course they often involve a curated graphic on the front. My history with this casual garment goes back a long way and bridges the period where the simple T-shirt transitioned from an undergarment to an almost universal cultural staple.

In the early 1950s, Marlon Brando, Sidney Poitier, and James Dean were instrumental in popularizing the “plain white tee,” which when paired with a pair of blue jeans, defined cool. They played edgy characters – outsiders trying to find their way in a hostile world – and as such their style was imitated extensively. Coupled with the advent of rock and roll music, adolescent boys channeled the aforementioned film and music icons by cuffing their blue jeans, slicking their hair, and squeezing into a tight white T-shirt.

For the next 20 years there were limited variations of the plain T-shirt, usually featuring product promotion logos. For example, a friend had a Cap'n Crunch T-shirt, which she acquired by saving and mailing away cereal box tops. But in the early 1970's things changed dramatically with the advent of the music band T-shirt. When Bill Graham founded the first music merchandising company, his company established the classic band template format that promoted the band's logo on the front of a T-shirt and their touring schedule on the back.

I recall a former student in the 1990s asking a classmate who was wearing a T-shirt for the band The Clash to name three songs by the group because they suspected that the wearer was not a true fan of the band; and so, it has been decades since the band T-shirt was almost exclusively emblematic of true fandom. Once Ramones, Blondie, Rage Against the Machine, and Rancid shirts started being sold in department stores and high-end record shops, the piece of attire that had once represented affinity, identification, and reverence had moved from the realm of subculture to the mainstream.

This was not a negative development but rather a predictable evolution. Regardless of why they are purchased and worn, band T-shirts allow their owners to both express their musical tastes as well as their style. The plain white tees worn by those cultural icons of the 1950s were emulated because they were invested with meaning. Without graphics, text, or overt messaging, they were worn because they were appealing and made the wearer feel good. It is no different with T-shirts featuring bands, sports teams, ironic statements, or geographical landmarks. T-shirts can be fun design statements as well as significant forms of self-expression.

Moreover, as we approach summer, T-shirts are a practical and literally cooler clothing option. As I sit here wearing a Tom Petty “Refugee” T-shirt, I cannot help but feel nostalgic, comfortable, and cool. If you are so motivated, dig out an old T-shirt and see if it makes you feel the same way.

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*Gian Marcon is a retired Catholic teacher and former Staff Officer at OECTA Provincial Office.*





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