



Authentic Recognition of Catholic Values

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Catholic values are at the very root of the tree of life. If the roots are strong, the tree will blossom. As Catholic leaders, we have been given the awesome opportunity to grow together in our faith as members of a Catholic school community. And it is through the teaching of Catholic values that we will create a healthy, strong and blossoming tree that will demonstrate who we are. As said in the Gospel of John; "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 5:15)

Effective modelling and authentic recognition of our Catholic values are essential for the spiritual and emotional growth of our students as well as ourselves. Living out our Catholic values is a lifelong journey wherein we are always learning from our own actions as well as those around us; both young and old.

There are plenty of examples of love, service and compassion that surround us throughout our daily encounters with the people in our lives. However, at times, we can get inundated with daily tasks and chores and those 'feel good' stories of truth, courage and kindness may get lost amid the day's responsibilities. We may get so caught up in our own work that we lose sight of the small yet important actions that make us all caring and helpful human beings.



"I am the vine, you are the branches."

John 5:15

It is crucial that we teach our students to see the positive and distinctive actions that make us who we are – Catholic learners. When we honour and recognize Christ-like acts of welcoming, sharing and persevering, we are nurturing the development of a whole person who will in turn encourage others to do the same.

The Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board has established a mission and vision that is rooted richly in faith and the values that collectively form our identity and provide us with the opportunity to be visible signs of Christ in today's world.

At Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Angus, we developed, what we believe to be, a truly authentic student recognition program to acknowledge Catholic values in action and encourage a friendly, faith-filled school community. We organize student-lead assemblies where Catholic values are explained and outlined through Gospel readings, songs, dramatic presentations and video demonstrations. Explicit teaching and learning of our values occur in large school gatherings and filter back to the intimacy of classroom lessons.

In the school's front foyer we display our Catholic Values Tree. In September the tree is bare and waiting anxiously to bloom. Every staff member is provided with leaves of a variety of colours. When they see Catholic values in action, they fill in the information on the leaf and present it to the student with an explanation of what they saw. The student may have helped a classmate with their work, cleaned up a mess without prompting, persevered on a complicated task, or told the truth when it was difficult. Right after the student receives a leaf, he or she comes to the school office to show it to the principal or vice-principal. The student proudly explains the action they were recognized for and they receive a high-five, handshake and a very big smile! The student then puts their leaf in a leaf-themed treasure box, which will be brought to the next recognition assembly.

At the recognition assembly, students are acknowledged for their actions once again, but this time with their peers present. When their name is called, students stand to receive applause. Following that, their coloured leaves are placed on the tree. Throughout the year our Catholic Values Tree blossoms and bursts with colour and Catholicity.

It is the authenticity and timeliness that make Our Lady of Grace's recognition program so effective. Students are recognized in the moment and they clearly know what it is that they have done to earn acknowledgment. The value is explained and recognition is immediate. The coloured leaf is such a simple symbol for their kind gesture, yet when the students present it to us in the office, they are beaming with pride and happiness. It is a truly meaningful and progressive way for school administrators to get to know all of their students while promoting and developing a positive school climate.

As principal or vice-principal our day is typically a very busy one. We can face a plethora of big and small problems in our office that are part of the regular requirements of our leadership role. However, the beautiful recognition moments, when we stop briefly to hear our student's stories and offer praise for their actions, are the most fulfilling part of our day.