



Faith Walks Enhancing Catholic Principals' Council Ontario PQP Courses

Sandra Donaghue, Principal at St. Veronica Elementary School – Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board – has introduced a unique experience when she delivers the CPCO Principal's Qualification Program. Candidates visit various areas in her school on their *Faith Walk* to see various displays of Catholic icons; pictures of students during prayers, communion and confirmation; photos displayed in the form of a cross; bulletin board displays; words and quotations from the Bible; religious icons in the community; and paintings that depict the importance of faith in Catholic schools.

"Enter to learn and prepare to serve."

... St. Veronica Elementary School

"I wanted to demonstrate how important it is to be clear, early in your discernment, that you are a faith leader and that is what we are trying to continuously embody in our schools," says Sandra. "This is a place that is safe and Catholicity is alive. You can feel the elements of spirituality and reflections and connections to the virtues and Catholic Graduate Expectations," outlines Sandra.

PQP candidates in Sandra's courses are encouraged to look at their schools as places that are distinctly different from other schools. "The course teaches how to return to your school tomorrow as a real faith leader and what you can do to ensure that you are enhancing that for your staff, for your students, for your community, and then linking that back to your parish and really trying to drive that parish-home-school connection."

Sandra based her ideas on John Kostoff's book *Auditing Our Catholic Schools – A Process of Discernment, Discussion, and Action*. John is the Director of Education at the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.

"John emphasizes the connections for being that instructional leader but really integrating the idea of being that instructional 'faith' leader. I tried to find an entry point for the PQP candidates to determine what they could bring immediately to any school community," Sandra outlines.

"Given that we are continually looking at instructional practice, we, as Catholic leaders, need to be integrating that with our faith and then finding every opportunity to always highlight and forefront that."

Sandra emphasizes that Catholic schools are part of a very distinct system; that we lead with our faith; that we are always looking for ways to be that servant leader but also continuously reflecting on student well-being and achievement.

"A Catholic school is a distinctive community, and we all care deeply about the education it provides. That education has formed us, and now, in turn, we have the opportunity to help shape it to meet the challenges of our time ... if we care about students, then we should care about the teachers, parents, clergy, and institutions that shape and deliver

education to our children.”

Excerpt from John Kostoff’s book: *Auditing Our Catholic Schools – A Process of Discernment, Discussion, and Action*

Sandra asks her candidates to describe what a Catholic school looks like and what it should look like to make it distinctly different than other schools. Next, the candidates determine their own success criteria for what the *Faith Walk* would look like, how long the experience would take and how they were going to go about it.

“The various groups of candidates approached it from a very different perspective which really brought to light the fact that when you do release that bit of control to the adults, they will take it in the direction in which they feel most comfortable and draw upon each member of the group’s strengths.”

The candidates were challenged to think about integrating any ideas they had from *Learning Walks* and integrating that into the *Faith Walk*. Candidates aligned their ideas with promoting student well-being and achievement to meet Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations to ensure that those expectations are reflected in their school.

Next, the candidates walked physically through the building taking note of the various examples that demonstrate Catholic faith. During the debriefing that followed, some groups established success criteria that they would find in a classroom. “Others used graphics and pictures to describe it. There was a lot of commonality and there were many different voices that we heard because there were so many lenses looking at it.”

Sandra describes the experience as a very non-threatening learning opportunity. “It was something that resonated with me to say this is something that would be so easy to move forward in a new school community as a brand new administrator. My staff could easily engage in this learning experience because it is built upon our common ground, which is our faith.”

Sandra says her greatest reflection for the entire journey was that she had to model the willingness to let go, and be open to a very unstructured and distinct process. “I really had no idea what was going to come back to me – it was my school that everybody was auditing at that time so there was that vulnerability that I had to put out there. I did also continually remind everybody that there was no judgment at any level – this was not something to be evaluative, rather to inform and to guide and to empower at the local school level. As a school principal, it was a great learning opportunity for me that I was able to bring to my staff to fuel what we could do next as a collective group of learners.”

Sandra has received positive feedback from her candidates:

“As an aspiring Catholic leader, I am grateful that I was able to take both parts of the Principal’s Qualification Program through CPCO. My Catholic faith is a driving force behind everything that I do—the way I see the world, how I choose to act, how I treat others, and who I am as an educator.

CPCO has high quality instructors with a wealth of experience, phenomenal guest speakers, and the unique ability to learn about school leadership through the Catholic lens. As a result of my experience with CPCO, I feel more confident in my abilities now that I have had the opportunity to partake in professional development with a focused Catholic leadership perspective.

... Loriana Romano – Elementary Teacher
Toronto Catholic District School Board

To learn more about CPCO’s Principal’s Qualification Program - [click here](#).

