

CSCO EASTER NEWSLETTER

(ISSUE #7)



Fellow CSCO members,

Thanks be to God; we made it!

What a remarkable time!

The Easter Season has arrived.

Our Lord and Saviour is so good to us!

Thank you to our contributors for this edition: Adriana Rerecich (two reflections: *CSCO Conference 2019: A Reflection* and *MIIGWETCH: A STORY OF ENCOUNTER AND GRATITUDE*), Don Hall (news of DREAMS), Nuri Garza shares a beautiful poem, Mary Defayette adds personal and chaplaincy reflections, David Dubowits asks us for our prayers, Mary Skiba shares a summary of a Development and Peace student workshop, Kimberly Lajoie shares a personal story of her family, Andrew Hall rocks with his students at Salt and Light and Kim Coursolle announces the birth of a brand new family member. Enjoy!



CSCO Conference 2019: A Reflection

“What happens at the CSCO conference, stays at the CSCO conference!”

Though some of us say this each year when we gather and it can allude to our activities being morally suspect (which they are not, I can assure you) the phrase does hint to a certain need we each share. Our vocations as Chaplains can be lonely and isolating as most of us are the only ones doing this holy work in our schools. Most of us are alone in our schools, fulfilling a ministry that is counter-cultural, offering a message that is sometimes unwelcome by staff, students, and/or the wider community. Our annual conferences are an excellent opportunity for us to be together, rejuvenate, share our

stories and be spiritually nourished in times of prayer and in times of dancing and conversation.

This past February we gathered at the Holiday Inn Yorkdale hosted by our brother and sister Chaplains of the Toronto Catholic board. Our commitment and nerves were tested as we made our way through yet another challenging storm. Despite delays with planes, trains and automobiles, we arrived safely though a little shaken and rattled. Seeking respite and company away from our busy lives and from the snow whirling outside, we immediately connected with each other and did what we do best. We picked up where we left off, finding each other to share our tales of life and work, seeking consolation and encouragement in our nods and hugs.

Upon registering, many of us made our way to our rooms, unpacking, unwinding and getting ready to make this our home for the next few days. We wandered, discovering who our neighbours were and where our peeps were located. When the conference officially began, we were together in prayer and embraced our AGM and the issues we had to face together. After which, we were more than ready to socialize and let our hair down. Let the music play!

The next day we were excited to hear Dr. Wicks and the ways he would touch our hearts and our minds. We were told that due to his health, he would not be joining us. Sharing a silent collective prayer of good wishes and excellent health for Dr. Wicks, we were told that in his place we would be in the good hands of Fr. Paul Hansen, C.Ss.R. Fr. Paul, the gracious man he is, cleared his schedule for us and our conference. According to the handout we were given, Dr. Wicks was going to lead us in the topic of strengthening the inner life of the Chaplain, basing much of his presentation

on his latest book, **Night Call** (which was included in each of our swag bags!). In Dr. Wicks' place, Fr. Paul gave us an overview of the book (with a side lesson on how to speed read.) He wove his wisdom and insight from his many years of travel and encounters with people from around the world. At the end of this, we were given time to set out in as much detail as possible, our own self-care protocols.

It was a great reminder that we need to always be mindful of our self-care plan. "Not being aware of secondary stress in chaplaincy can be quite dangerous because the seeds of involvement and the seeds of compassion fatigue are the same seeds" (Wicks, **Night Call**). Our ministries demand that we pay attention to how we are taking care of ourselves: we get affected by the issues we are dealing with and with those we are ministering to. This is perhaps why the CSCO conferences are so necessary for us to attend: we "get" each other and can help each other. We know the signs and the facial expressions that give away our inner realities.

The Toronto team planned a special outing for those who were interested to visit the Salt and Light studios on Thursday afternoon. This was a great excursion to see first-hand how God is working through the satellite waves reaching viewers at home. It was an eye-opening event to see all that takes place behind the scenes so stories of our faith can be made tangible for those unable to travel the world or are housebound.

Later that night, our banquet was stunningly decorated, and the food exquisite as we gathered amid laughter and friendship. It was a perfect night to celebrate our association and each other. We honoured all those who were retiring (insert sad face here) and we recognized Dominic Pullano as the recipient of the Brian Halferty Award 2019. His years of service to Chaplaincy and to CSCO were many. He was one of the

original pioneers of school Chaplaincy along with Brian Halferty, Stan Muldoon, Denise Colterman-Fox, Peter King and others. It is on their shoulders on which we now stand and we carry the torch of Chaplaincy into the future.

On Friday, we shared best practices and by sharing, became wiser, learning vicariously through each other. It was revealed that our CSCO Conference 2020 is going to be held at Queen of the Apostles Centre in Mississauga, hosted by the Dufferin Peel Chaplains. In the middle of one mountaintop experience we get to look forward to the next mountaintop event.

Thank you, Toronto Chaplains, for gathering us amid challenging circumstances and still managing to provide us with nourishment to continue the holy work to which we have been called. It is an honour and a privilege to be counted among you as one who serves alongside each of you.



Adriana Rerecich is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School in Oakville.



During our 20th anniversary of St. Mary's DREAMS, our students and chaperones built a couple new homes for families in the San Jose de Ocoa region of the Dominican Republic. For the first time in the history of the program, we were blessed to have a priest join each of our two groups as chaperones. Fr. Jarek from St. Patrick Parish in Hamilton traveled with our March 1 group while Fr. Tim from St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Waterdown traveled with our March 2 group. As you can see in the 3rd photo, usually 50 local people joined us daily for 6:00 P.M. Mass. One couple asked Fr. Tim to marry them.



Don Hall is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Mary Catholic Secondary School in Hamilton.

AN EASTER POEM-reflection



There is “something”
that smells beauty, looks colourful and tastes fresh,
something. . . yes!
Something out there!
My eyes can see it, perceive it and feel it.
It reflects light, a bright and beautiful light.
It shines! ... woooooow it really glows!
Emanates a bright powerful light, very bright.
Like a very special light,
a bright, fire full, and amazing light!

It's very bright!

Look!

Look around!... close your eyes and smell.

It smells God, it feels God, it is God!

Brighter, stunning, shinier than ever before.

Ooh God, you are here, yes, here!

All your creation around is waiving at you,
growing, glowing, dancing, and honouring you...

the birds, the flowers, the rivers, the air, the entire creation bowing at

The majesty of you Lord!

Creation is in its full ecstasies today!

You have conquered dead,

Jesus has resurrected!

Life is back! Darkness is vanished!

All is touched and renewed by you.

Jesus has brought us back to life!

We have been saved and given the gift of "new life"

A new life in Christ!

Yes! A new life in Christ!

Glory to you oh Lord!

Amen.

Nuri

Nuri Garza is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Joseph Catholic Secondary School in London.

"Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."(Proverbs 16:24 NIV)

I've been following a couple of blogs lately- today one blog began with Proverb 16:24 "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." This particular proverb likely caught my attention for a couple of reasons- the obvious one being that my husband is a beekeeper with 40 beehives located on our property....so anything with honey, bees etc naturally attracts my attention. The other reason is that this particular school year I have been blessed with gracious words that have truly brought healing.

As many of you know, my father passed away September 2- necessitating me to take the first week of school off- my colleagues in the board and around the province were ever so kind with cards of condolences and support. November I managed to break my right wrist when I slipped on my way to work. It was the "street person" the guy who goes through the recycle bins on the city street who helped me up that day- it was that same street person who a week later told me that he had been looking for me and asked was I okay. Such a blessing. Again in November just two days after I broke my wrist, my husband had eye surgery for his glaucoma that did not go well (he can see less now than he could)...the surgeon told him he was not to lift or bend for 6 weeks- John was upset as it meant that he was unable to get to the pile of lumber that needed to be cut, split and stacked for our winter heating. He had another procedure on his other eye at the end of January, this time things went a bit better. In February he suffered a heart attack, - how, you might ask, can I feel blessed? When sitting in the quiet room at the Heart Institute, having just been left to ruminate by the social worker who was assigned to me- I began to cry. For those that know me well, you know that I am not one to cry easily, if ever- but that moment, that February 6, at the Heart Institute in Ottawa, alone in the room- I began to cry, and sing- "Yahweh, I know you are near....standing always at my side, you guard me from the foe, and you lead me in ways everlasting...." I am blessed because I know that God is always at my side, no matter what, no matter when. God is present in those I work with, in my family, in the folks I meet on the street and all around me, if only I have eyes to see. And all these folks have blessed me this year, with gracious words and kind gestures.

In gratitude
Mary



On a different note....

I am so blessed to journey with students- their stories stay with me, often keeping me awake at night in prayer. Not every student I journey with embraces our Catholic faith- but sometimes the seeds fall on fertile ground. This year I am particularly grateful for three women who have blessed me in more ways than they will ever know. These three women were once students in schools where I was chaplain- Natalie, Charity and Jackie are now colleagues in the province- Natalie in London, Charity in Brockville and Jackie here in Ottawa. I can't describe how much I have appreciated each of them this past year, whether it be through the kind note I received after my father's death, to the laughter and joy shared on the dance floor at our recent chaplains conference- to the resources shared when I needed inspiration. The joy, passion and enthusiasm these three women bring to chaplaincy inspires me and gives me hope. For Natalie, Charity and Jackie I am grateful.

Mary Defayette (center) is the Chaplaincy Leader at Immaculata Catholic Secondary School in Ottawa (Natalie Hleba (left) is the Chaplaincy Leader at Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School in London, Charity Corbett (right) is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Mary Catholic Secondary School in Brockville and Jaclynne Neri is a Chaplaincy Leader with the Ottawa Catholic District School Board.)



When one looks at the criteria that a candidate must ideally meet to be considered for *The Brian J. Halferty Chaplaincy Award*, it is a rather daunting list of no less than nine items! It is our honour this year to congratulate an individual who not only simply “checks off” all the boxes on the list, but is a person who rather has truly embodied them with excellence during his 30 years of school chaplaincy ministry.

As we heard earlier this evening in his Retirement Tribute, Deacon Dr. Dominic Pullano began working in school chaplaincy in 1989. During those early days of full funding, Dominic worked tirelessly as an early

pioneer to establish a vibrant ministry that still thrives in all of our schools to this day!

In those first few years, no one really knew what full-time school chaplaincy was and what it should entail. Besides confirming and entrenching what we would now consider the routine responsibilities of a school chaplain, Dominic put in many hours of extra effort to try and help define and explain what school chaplaincy was to others. He was also a leader in those early years in the struggle for a just salary, equitable benefits, and fair working conditions.

During his 19 years of ministry in Halton Catholic, we heard earlier that Dominic served in 5 different secondary schools. When I've heard Dominic speak of the Halton years, it is with much fondness and appreciation. No doubt, however, there must have been many challenges with moving schools every few years. During those times, Dominic epitomized a gospel "zeal" and a willingness to be sent by God; he also witnessed the grace to trust that same God when change came his way.

Always keen to get involved, it took only two years of high school ministry for Dominic to become part of a planning team for the 1992 CSCO Conference. That year, Dominic volunteered with Brian Halferty and some others from the Toronto Catholic Board to plan a conference that featured the *Christian Life Community* from Guelph.

It was also in 1992 when Dominic began his 12 years of exemplary service to the CSCO and was elected Vice-President. As VP, he contributed to the Executive's efforts to finalize and publish our *Constitution*. Dominic also worked with CSCO President Pat Finnigan, Brian Halferty, Tom Reilly from the Ontario Bishops Conference, and Sr. Joan Cronin from ICE to write the first set of *School Chaplaincy Guidelines* in the Province of Ontario. Additionally, Dominic acted as the Executive Liaison to all the Conferences during those 4 years.

After a four year break from the Executive, Dominic was elected President of the CSCO, serving from 2000-2004. As President, he recalls doing a lot of "behind the scenes" advocacy and spending a lot of time attending meetings and supporting the members of the writing team of the 2004 document, "Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Attraction."

Next came four additional years on the CSCO Executive in the role of Past President. During those years, Dominic recalls three significant contributions. First, he chaired the committee that wrote *A Covenant For Responsible Ministry: A Code of Conduct for Catholic School Chaplaincy Leaders*, which was published in January 2009. Second, it was as Past President where Dominic helped the Executive establish *The Brian J. Halferty Award* for meritorious service to school chaplaincy in Ontario. Last but not least, he advocated that the Past President role on the Executive should last only one year, which is currently the practice.

A graduate of both St. Michael's College School and the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, Dominic has also exemplified an ongoing commitment to theological education and faith formation. He enjoyed returning to St. Michael's Faculty of Theology for a half-year sabbatical after his first 10 years of ministry in Halton Catholic. In 2007, after discerning a call to the permanent diaconate, Dominic enrolled in the formation program of the Archdiocese of Toronto and received ordination in May 2010. Since then, he has served at St. David's Parish in Maple.

However, the permanent diaconate was not to be the end of his formal studies. Inspired by his ministry within Catholic education, Dominic enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in 2013. After a tremendous amount of effort and with much perseverance, Deacon "Doctor" Dominic defended his thesis on the topic of the Spirituality of the Catholic Educator in April 2017.

As you all know, good ministry begins and thrives through hospitality and relationship. Dominic knows that in spades and he lives it. He is a builder of bridges between people, communities and souls. As Adult Faith Animator in the DCDSB since 2008, he has been a huge blessing to our small Durham Chaplains group, and we are heartbroken that no plan exists at present to replace him. (Not that he is really ever replaceable!) Our group of 7 has undergone a good deal of challenge and change, since he joined us in 2008, (the same year I was hired). There have been hellos and goodbyes, changes of Superintendents responsible for us, different Board visions and directions, personal illnesses, new babies, retirements, leaves of varying lengths, and the blessing of new colleagues to include in our monthly meetings. Builders of bridges have been needed to keep

hospitality and relationship growing and flourishing throughout all of this. Among our group we have been blessed with a few of those bridge builders. And Dominic has been our main man helping to ensure that we have opportunities to do that building.

From the get-go, we knew Dominic was one of us, and that he understood us because he had walked in our shoes already for all his years in High School Chaplaincy. He has been our advocate with the powers that be, especially when the role of Chaplaincy Team leader was not well understood by Senior Admin. in our Board, many of whom had not worked extensively in Secondary, or understood our Pastoral role before being placed in decision making roles that affected each one of our small group.

Dominic has kept us organized with our monthly meetings, and strongly supported us in our chosen focus on prayer and meditation together before we get to the agenda for the meeting.

Without that solid base of prayer together, we'd never be the close-knit group we are, and the Holy Spirit may have had a good deal more difficulty getting air time to speak among us! Dominic has offered us support and direction, both spiritually and practically; he has both facilitated and participated in our annual retreats. He has supported us by presiding over liturgies in our schools, blessed and affirmed our students, mentored us and consoled us. He has been a theological consultant, preacher, and spiritual director to some, a friend and confidante to others, always a willing ear and presence to accompany us through the ups and downs of ministry in our schools.

In his unique role as Deacon and Adult Faith Animator, Dominic has been a builder of bridges of faith, trust and collaboration between all the partners we work with in Catholic Education. He has been uniquely placed to build bridges through relationship everywhere he has gone. In Durham, he has helped to forge stronger connections between priests; both local clergy and the Jesuit community at Manresa, and our Durham Board; between our Chaplains group and our Board Staff; between parishes and schools, between School Faith Animators and their staff, and between individuals in many interpersonal relationships. He has helped to keep current the knowledge and understanding of staff in our board about

developments in our Universal Church, new encyclicals from Pope Francis, and so built bridges between Catholic educators and the Universal Church. He has had extensive participation in everything that affects Chaplaincy Team Leaders: CSCO, When Faith Meets Pedagogy, Catholic Curriculum Corporation, Development and Peace, ShareLife, and on and on (the list is long!) All of these many roles he has played have been an immensely valuable resource to us. Suffice to say, he has kept us all "dialed in", offered us many opportunities for ongoing faith formation and professional development as well, and he has always **always** had our backs, as Chaplaincy Leaders.

But, I like to think that with us, the Catholic School Chaplains of Ontario, Dominic is at his most real, authentic and relaxed, which is how we know and love him best! I think it's fair to say: "We are his true "peeps"!"

And that's a real joy for all of us! And we know that Dominic knows how to celebrate life in every way possible. At CSCO Conferences, he is always fully present to help lead and shepherd the celebration of our faith in our prayers and liturgies. And he also celebrates with us as fellow sheep: sometimes into the wee hours singing along with the musical crowd, other times in quiet conversation over wine with some trusted friends.

And then, there's the Dominic on the Chaplains Conference dance floor! For those of you who were not around in the 70s, if you want a glimpse into the heart of the young Dominic Pullano, just check out "Saturday Night Fever". Legend has it that Dominic was **the whole package** back in the day. He was the "Italian stallion". He had the white suit, the black hair, the debonair style and grace of the perfect gentleman. He was light on his feet, and he knew all the best John Travolta dance moves. And we know when he's on **our** dance floor, our Dominic is still as young at heart and full of life as the days he wore that white suit. And that's a true joy to witness!

So, wherever your life takes you from here, Dominic, dance away, man! With the Holy Spirit showing us the moves, we'll be dancing with you, whenever, wherever, and however we get the chance! For our part, just know that the pleasure and the privilege has been all ours.

Now, Eileen and I could easily continue this Dominic "love fest" ourselves for at least ... a few more seconds!

But knowing that Dominic has always valued community and has always served others with love, we also wanted to include the testimonies of some of Dominic's colleagues. As you will hear, they add affirmation to his worthiness for this Award.

From Dave, a Secondary Principal:

"Dominic has the amazing ability to bring our Catholic faith alive in a way that is both insightful and enlightening. His knowledge and experience has been an asset for him amidst the work he has done with our adult educators. For me, Dominic has helped to make the Catholic faith one that I am proud to say I am a part of and one that provides me with hope for the future and thanks for what I have now."

From Tish, Teaching and Learning Consultant, Religion and Family Life, Equity and Inclusion:

"Deacon Dominic has supported our Catholic Education Centre staff in so many wonderful ways: liturgies, Masses, gatherings when tragedies sadly fell upon one of us. His presence and his thoughtful words centred our work around prayer and faith and strengthened us as a community of believers."

From Joni, Elementary Teacher and now Vice-Principal, and a former Faith Ambassador:

"Dominic has been and continues to be a true inspiration to me in my vocation as a Catholic Educator and leader. His warm, inviting nature and his passion of truly working "with" others is very evident in everything he does. Dominic is a modern day Shepherd Leader."

From Denise, Retired (I mean, Redirected!) Chaplain:

"I always felt it was effortless to work with Dominic because he was always so supportive, easy-going, very insightful, very knowledgeable, faith-filled, all with a sense of humour. I always felt relaxed and at home in his presence ... a sign of a loving soul! Dominic is the kind of colleague that emulates St. Therese of Lisieux he shied away from the spotlight and worked diligently "doing small but important things with great love."

And finally, from Rosemary, Superintendent of Education, Faith Formation (Dominic's immediate supervisor!)

"Dominic has taught me so much about pastoral care and true servant leadership. Through times of joy and sorrow, he has been there to minister to the needs of our staff and school communities. He has walked the path of Jesus not only in his words, but in his quiet and countless acts of kindness and care. I will always be grateful for his steadfast support and leadership."

So, Deacon Dr. Dominic ...

On behalf of all those to whom you have ministered ...

On behalf of your colleagues in chaplaincy who have gone before you and unfortunately can't be here in person ...

And finally, on behalf of all us, now present with you tonight ...

Thank you, thank you, thank you ...

And **CONGRATULATIONS** on being this year's recipient of the Brian J. Halferty Chaplaincy Award!!!

David Dubowits is the Chaplain at Monsignor Paul Dwyer Catholic High School in Oshawa. (Please keep David in your thoughts and prayers as he's on a leave of absence.) And Eileen McGowan is the Chaplaincy Leader at All Saints Catholic Secondary School in Whitby.



On Holy Wednesday, April 17th, 48 students from Sacred Heart High School in Walkerton and St. Mary's High School in Owen Sound had the opportunity to participate in a Development and Peace Workshop at Sacred Heart Church in Walkerton. Students enjoyed an informative and interactive day, learning about migration and refugees.

After sharing their own heritage in a large group orientation game, students participated in a refugee simulation game that gave them first-hand exposure to the choices and decisions that millions of refugees face each year. Students heard personal testimonies from refugee students who were forced to leave their home country and journey to Canada, currently living with refugee status. Students also learned about the organization of Development and Peace and its many ways of supporting the Catholic Social Teachings. The Sacred Heart and St. Mary's students were engaged in their learning and will have ideas moving forward, such as organizing a Walk-a-thon, on how to help support Development and Peace.

The staff and students appreciated Lorenzo Campanelli and his team for sharing their mission with them.



Deb Legace (left) is the Chaplaincy Leader at Sacred Heart High School in Walkerton and Mary Skiba (right) is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Mary's High School in Owen Sound.

From Kimberly Lajoie...

This has been a devastating experience, yet one that has given me much insight and compassion and understanding for something that is more common than we realize. My daughter Amanda and her husband Kevin were married in Costa Rico. After they returned, they waited to conceive, to alleviate the fear of having contracted the zica virus. Kevin was ill for a while and after many tests he was told they thought he had lung cancer. He was monitored for months at the cancer clinic and his last check up in August showed that it was not, thankfully, cancer. So they finally tried to conceive and were expecting in June.

Amanda was 7 months pregnant and healthy with the baby very active. When she noticed he hadn't moved much, she went to the hospital were the baby was deemed dead. She was induced and gave birth to a beautiful son who appears to be perfect. Baby and placenta were sent away for an autopsy and they cannot find a reason. They had him cremated and named him Nash.

So Nash Chaput is home with our Lord. My daughter's name is Amanda Chaput.

Blessings, Kimberly

Kimberly Lajoie is the Chaplaincy leader at Regina Mundi Catholic College in London. We pray for the repose of the soul of Nash Chaput and for his parents, Amanda and Kevin, and for his Grandmother, Kimberly and family.





St. John's College (Brantford) brought 25 students to Salt and Light TV in Toronto to celebrate Mass together. Our Senior Worship Band and choir led music ministry. It was a beautiful experience for our students.



Andrew Hall (right) is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. John's College in Brantford. Sebastian Gomes (center) is a producer at Salt and Light Media. And Don Hall is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Mary Catholic Secondary School in Hamilton (left).

From Kimberly Coursolle...

I had my little guy Eliah on January 23rd, he is a great little one and we are all doing well.



Kimberly Coursolle is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School in Thunder Bay. She is currently on maternity leave.



MIIGWETCH: A STORY OF ENCOUNTER AND GRATITUDE

Our faith calls us to use Lent to discern and deal with those things that are hindering our own faith growth through forgiveness of others, circumstances and ourselves. Through this process, we are drawn closer to God, to our faith and to others. To have the mind and heart for an encounter, we are called to be like prophets: being in relationship with God, acknowledging our mission, and being ready to go where the road leads knowing it will lead us to a greater awareness of God's work in and for the world.

Back in October, long before Lent was our reality, a group of us from Halton Catholic (led by Sherry Saevil, Halton Catholic's very own Indigenous Education Advisor) had the privilege of travelling to Manitoulin Island for a weekend Indigenous education immersion experience. We met on a chilly Friday morning, loading the bus with our overnight bags, supplies of food (we were responsible for some of our meals and snacks) and our laughter, not knowing what was awaiting us that would see us through this unknown and sacred encounter. This encounter was filled with everything we love about our faith.

The road less travelled is always better when travelling it with friends and colleagues who share hope, faith and the necessity for snacks and hot beverages that have become the staple for any Canadian road trip. After many hours on the road (which included a stop at the famous *French River Trading Post*) we finally arrived at the Rainbow Lodge, our home for the next couple of days.

A wonderful rustic log cabin with a beautiful fireplace on the main floor surrounded by soft, oversized couches, and an oversized dining table and spacious rooms, we felt at ease almost immediately. The windows, large and looking over the breathtaking northern Ontario landscape that surrounds this haven of hospitality, allowed the morning sunlight to glow throughout the space. At night, the fireplace blazing allowed another kind of warm glow to warm us as we ate and made merry in our conversation.

Our sacred encounter began Friday night when our hosts, Craig Fox and Falcon Migwans, introduced themselves and shared their stories with us. Filled with the pain of forced separation from family and community, the pain of abuse and humiliation, we sat, humbled and inspired that despite those circumstances, they now found themselves on a trajectory that was filled with healing, community, and leadership. They are agents of truth and reconciliation so the mistakes of the past can remain there. There was travel, friendship, stories, food and there was wisdom: the first day.

Once we were ready Saturday morning, we gathered outside where Craig was going to lead us on the sacred hike to Dreamer's Rock. This was holy ground on which we were walking, and it was clear no photos were allowed. This hike is the pilgrimage young members of the community are required to do as a coming of age towards adulthood. It can also be a pilgrimage that individuals can repeat as their life circumstances demand. It involves hiking towards Dreamer's Rock, a sacred place high in the hills, and remaining there for four days and nights, fasting, withstanding the elements, the wild life, and one's own internal landscape with all

its temptations, turbulence and solitude. Once at Dreamer's Rock, it is said visions can occur, leading the pilgrim to a profound reunion with the Creator and/or elders of the past.

On our way towards this holy site, there was indeed a sacred encounter as we witnessed the sighting of three golden eagles soaring above us, the sunlight shining through their feathers. Standing in admiration of this sight, we were told it is a rare thing to see one and here we were, witnessing the glorious flight of three! It was not lost on us the connection between these three golden eagles and our holy Trinity of the divine presence. We stood still, sharing a holy silence as they soared and flew out of sight.

Later that evening, we were back at the lodge, gathered around the dining table as Craig guided us in making our own medicine wheels. While making these, it became very clear how connected life and creation is for the First Nations and Indigenous peoples and how this understanding shapes relationships, community, governance, circumstances—everything. It was a sharp contrast to the reality many of us live where disconnect and disharmony is common and we neglect the natural rhythm of the seasons, let alone the 24 hour day. There was laughter, there was music and there was knowledge: the second day.

The next day saw us celebrating mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception:

This church in the round represents a tipi, a fire pit and the circle of life, and it welcomes aboriginal traditions and Catholic beliefs. Colourful paintings by local artists depict the stations of the cross, while magnificent carvings represent both Christ and the Great Spirit, Kitche Manitou. (taken from the Lonely Planet website.)

Mass was an uplifting experience of spiritual connection with a smudging before the Confiteor, and the peace-making of a young child who made it his mission to shake hands with every person present during the sign of peace. After mass, we were invited to share in hospitality with the community who gathered regularly to share soup and coffee, coming together weekly in solidarity. In such a remote area, coming together like this helps keep the sting of separation at bay, where distances between neighbours and villages are magnified by the stretches of highway, hills and water. Following this shared meal, we were then led by Falcon to walk

through the local woods to receive a lesson on how the First Nations and Indigenous peoples work with the natural habitat to survive. We learned about plants that healed various ailments, and which ones supported health. (Did you know that cedar is an excellent source of vitamin C? It makes for a great cup of tea on a wintry night!)

When it came time to leave Manitoulin, there was the familiar resistance ebbing through our bodies that sought to remain in this vastness of landscape and connection with creation. This had become our pilgrimage, teaching us much about ourselves, each other and our collective history. We paused our lives to encounter a culture and people that history has taught us to ignore. Back in October, we lived Lent, opening our hearts for an encounter and learning that God is God of all. We are, all of us, intricately connected to each other and the land. Our most profound prayer has been and will be, gratitude. So we say Miigwetch to that mighty Kitchi Manitou! There was celebration, there were goodbyes, there was Eucharist and safe travel: the third day. And God saw that it was good.



Adriana Rerecich is the Chaplaincy Leader at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School in Oakville.

Thanks again to Adriana, Don, Nuri, Mary, David, Eileen, Mary, Kimberly, Andrew and Kim for their contributions.

The Year-end Newsletter will be issued at the end of the school year.

Please consider submitting any good news, prayers, stories, reflections, or insights by June 21st 2019.

Send it to Lorenzo at cisco.vp@gmail.com.

Include a photo or image.



A faith- and joy-filled Easter Season to all of you!

Jesus is Risen!

Truly, He is Risen!