

ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



**PASTORAL LETTER ON CATHOLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY**

A Pastoral Letter from the Education Commission
March 2009

Pastoral Letter on Catholic Secondary School Chaplaincy

The Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops is pleased to present this pastoral letter to the Catholic educational community of our province. After twenty-five years of experience with publicly-funded Catholic secondary schools, it has become more than ever evident that good chaplaincy services are an essential element in the development of these learning communities.

Much time and energy has gone into preparing this pastoral letter. Extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including chaplaincy leaders themselves, were held a few years ago as we sought to respond to some pressing issues of the day. Re-reading of past documents, reflection on the present situation and questioning the future was characteristic of the discussions around the commission's table as well as at the plenary sessions of the OCCB. First drafts were extensively rewritten with the help of many educational leaders. A final draft was circulated for yet more input. We believe the present text represents the collective effort not just of the bishops, but of many members of our provincial educational community most committed to the development of chaplaincy services in our secondary schools.

This document does not establish rules and regulations. Rather, it proposes a common vision and path for the development and growth of this essential ministry in our Catholic schools. It focuses on secondary school chaplaincy services, but its insights can help reflection on such services at the elementary school level. It does not purport to answer all questions, striving instead to paint with broad strokes the picture of what vibrant, efficient chaplaincy services should look like.

For this letter to bear the greatest possible fruit, it will need the collaboration and commitment of all leaders in our Catholic educational community, particularly of the chaplaincy leaders themselves. The members of the Commission wish to acknowledge the commitment of our Catholic school boards in providing chaplaincy services to our secondary schools. They particularly wish to acknowledge the ongoing generosity of our chaplaincy leaders, the extraordinary level of service they bring to these secondary schools and the importance of their role as front-line workers in the development of the Catholic school project. We hope this letter will encourage them to continue in this way, knowing that they are supported and appreciated by their pastors and brothers and sisters in the faith.

Yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Paul-André Durocher
Chair, Education Commission
Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Introduction

The Catholic Bishops of Ontario have always been aware of the fundamental importance of chaplaincy services within our Catholic schools.

In November 1985, the OCCB's Ad hoc Committee for Completion [of publicly-funded Catholic secondary schools] published a letter on "*Pastoral Care Ministry in a Catholic Secondary School.*" This five-page document outlined a series of suggestions concerning the establishment and development of chaplaincy services as full-funding became a reality for our Catholic secondary schools.

In 1993, the OCCB published "*La pastorale scolaire: fondements, orientations et considérations pour les écoles catholiques de langue française de l'Ontario.*" This document became the foundational reference for French-language Catholic schools in the province.

In 1996, the Education Commission of the OCCB approved for distribution a text prepared by the Catholic School Chaplains of Ontario entitled "*Guidelines for School Chaplaincy in Ontario,*" which became a foundational reference for English-language Catholic schools in the province.

Today, the Education Commission of the OCCB wants to reiterate its support for all those involved in chaplaincy in our Catholic schools. We invite all leaders and supporters of Catholic education to recognize and celebrate their presence, service and contribution to the mission of our schools.

The 1985 *Letter* tried to define secondary school chaplaincy by describing its purpose or goal:

- "take the What of religious classes and translate it into the How of Christian Catholic living into the whole regime of the school and the life of faculty and students;"
- "The total faith development of the school community, an increased commitment to Christ by both staff and students;"

La pastorale scolaire defines chaplaincy in the following terms:

- “The action of the liberating Christ in the heart of the school community, through a set of well-thought-out and meaningful interventions accomplished within the Church.”

Guidelines for School Chaplaincy puts it this way:

- “School chaplaincy is a pastoral role carried out in an educational setting in a collaborative and cooperative manner in order to promote the spiritual and human development of the members of the Catholic school community.”

These definitions converge on the four following points:

- that secondary school chaplaincy is exercised for the whole school community, students and staff;
- that it seeks an increase in the Christian faith-life of all;
- that it is ecclesial in its nature and its goal;
- that it is shaped by the educational setting in which it is carried out.

Taking these four points, we can further develop our understanding of chaplaincy in the context of our Catholic schools, and determine considerations both for chaplaincy leaders and for school leaders that will continue to sustain this essential ministry.

1. Secondary school chaplaincy is exercised for the whole school community, students and staff

Secondary school chaplaincy is not the same as youth ministry. It seeks to serve not only the students who belong to a given school, but the adult staff as well. Its concern is for all the members of the school community.

Its concern is also for the school as a community, not only as a group of individuals. In this sense, secondary school chaplaincy is quite different from chaplaincy in other institutional settings where the primary focus is on the accompaniment of the individuals who are served by the institution or who work there.

We can speak of two inter-related foci in the actualization of secondary-school chaplaincy. On the one hand, chaplaincy leaders are called to focus on the individuals who make up the school community. They accompany them in their faith journey, are present to them in times of difficulty, pray with them, and offer accompaniment to them on their spiritual journey.

Chaplaincy leaders are also called to focus on the school community itself. By gathering the community in fellowship, in prayer and worship as well as in catechesis, chaplaincy

leaders foster the response of the whole school to the presence of Christ and the action of Christ's Spirit. By sending the community to evangelize, to build a world of solidarity and justice, to witness in holiness, chaplaincy leaders help the community become a light for the world and salt for the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16).

Considerations for chaplaincy leaders

Some balance should be sought between the inter-related foci of the individual and the community as a whole, in terms of interest, ability, time and energy.

Ongoing formation is needed in both personal accompaniment and spiritual direction, on the one hand, and leadership skills and community development, on the other.

Note:

Chaplaincy leaders must have an awareness of the limitations of their chaplaincy-related counselling role and recognize the need to refer students to qualified personnel for specialized counselling.

Considerations for school leaders

The job description of a secondary school chaplaincy leader should reflect both of these inter-related foci.

Formation and training should be offered to develop the ability of secondary school chaplaincy leaders to act effectively in both of these areas.

Secondary school chaplaincy leaders should be invited to collaborate with the leadership team of Catholic secondary schools in fostering overall community life.

2. Secondary school chaplaincy seeks an increase in the Christian faith-life of all

Secondary school chaplaincy is not the same as religious education. The latter focuses on the intellectual understanding and appropriation of Catholic tradition. As the General Directory for Catechesis explains, school classes in religious education assist students “to better understand the Christian message by relating it to the great existential concerns common to all religions and to every human being, to the various visions of life particularly evident in culture and to those major moral questions which confront humanity today.” (#75)

Though such classes are essential for a Catholic school to realize its mission, they are not sufficient. They must be supplemented by activities that will allow students to make this intellectual process concrete by responding to the Gospel with who they are and how they live. In this way, chaplaincy services provide a kind of workshop where the theory of religious education can be lived out in the reality of community life. Through liturgy and common worship, through social justice projects, through the development of leadership skills, through working out the various ethical challenges that life entails, through the formation of character by growth in the virtuous life, all members of the school community learn to make their Christ-centred faith real.

Considerations for chaplaincy leaders

Chaplaincy leaders should see themselves as natural partners with religious education teachers as they complement each other in helping young people grow in their faith.

Chaplaincy activities must be varied in approach, style, content and focus in order to touch the many varied individuals who make up the school community in their very individuality. They must include activities that gather the community, but also send it out in service and witness. They must address the mind, the heart and the soul.

Considerations for school leaders

Structures must be established that foster and sustain partnership between the religious education department and chaplaincy services.

They must learn to see chaplaincy services as much more than a coordinating body for school liturgies.

3. Secondary school chaplaincy is ecclesial in its nature and its goal

By its very nature, secondary school chaplaincy is ecclesial. It is important to remember that Catholic schools are themselves an expression and realization of the Church's responsibility to "teach all people." All those who collaborate in a Catholic school's mission are involved in an ecclesial activity, an activity shaped by the Church's concern for all.

This is even more evident in the case of teachers of religion and chaplaincy leaders. Though neither group receives mandates from Church authorities, still they share in the Church's ministry to its members. They are guided by the Church's teaching and practical advice; they foster a sense of collegiality with all the Church's ministers; they understand their specific ministry in the broader context of a diocese's life.

Helping people to become all they are called to be in the image and likeness of God, chaplaincy leaders foster a growing awareness and appreciation for the fact that God is a *communio* of three divine persons whose image in us calls us to *communio* with God and with each other. Of this *communio*, the Church is a sacrament and herald. In this sense, therefore, secondary school chaplaincy is also ecclesial in its goal. For as chaplaincy leaders realize their mandate, they collaborate in the building up of the Church itself.

Many Catholic schools are diverse in the cultural, ethnic and faith backgrounds of their students. Some students have little experience of religious practice or church attendance. In this context an important task of school leaders is to recognize and celebrate God's presence and activity within this diversity. Evangelization is part of the chaplaincy leaders' mission as they are called to serve in creative and new endeavours where the Gospel may not have been heard.

Considerations for chaplaincy leaders

Though secondary school chaplaincy leaders do not receive particular mandates from their diocesan bishop, they are recognized as front line workers in the Church's ministry, particularly to young people. They have a responsibility to collaborate in pastoral leadership for these young people in a given diocese. Chaplaincy leaders should participate in structures that foster such collaboration, particularly with local parishes and priests. The presence of a priest on a chaplaincy team, even as volunteer chaplain, is highly desirable.

Secondary school chaplaincy leaders must always see their ministry as embedded in the Church's ministry and understand themselves as sharing in the Church's responsibilities. Their convictions and commitments should reflect the Church's own convictions and commitments. They should be active members of their parish: their words, actions, and their whole life should be consistent with Catholic faith and teaching.

Considerations for school leaders

Allowance should be made for chaplaincy leaders to develop and maintain good relationships with the diocese and local parishes, including participation in deanery or pastoral zone meetings.

Good communication between the diocese and the board, on the one hand, and between local parishes and the school, on the other, are to be fostered.

Considerations for diocesan leaders

Secondary school chaplaincy leaders must be considered vital partners in the diocese's life and mission. They should be integrated into decision-making and implementation processes concerning the evangelization and pastoral care of the youth of a diocesan Church.

Celebrations of affirmation, meetings with the bishop, participation in a diocesan youth network, invitations to deanery meetings, information sessions for parish pastoral teams concerning secondary school chaplaincy: these are all examples of concrete steps that can be taken to ensure that secondary school chaplaincy is a vibrant element in the overall pastoral activity of the diocese.

4. Secondary school chaplaincy is shaped by the educational setting in which it is carried out

It is important to acknowledge that a Catholic school is an educational institution that plays a valuable collaborative and supportive role in the Church's ministry. It is equally important to recognize that only a parish has the attributions of the fullness of sacramental life and the inherent canonical and pastoral structures.

A school's purpose is to foster "integral formation by means of a systematic and critical assimilation of culture" (Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, # 26). This process is systematic in that the curriculum is organized and progressive; it is critical in that students are led into the use of reasoning skills that allow them to become masters of their own learning. A school, therefore, has its own goals, its own structure, and its own identity. Students, as a rule, are compelled to attend. Governments and boards establish regulations and policies that specify content of activities, planning and reporting procedures, financing, *et al.*

It is in this very specialized context that secondary school chaplaincy takes its place. In its interventions and activities, it must adhere to the school's own structures and ethos. Much of its energy is devoted to co-instructional projects, which is both its weakness and its strength. It is a weakness inasmuch as it risks setting chaplaincy on the margins of the school's life; it is a strength inasmuch as it allows for greater creativity, freedom and relevance.

Considerations for chaplaincy leaders

Secondary school chaplaincy activities need to be informed by scholastic approaches, including planning, setting of outcomes, evaluation and accountability.

Considerations for school leaders

In order to flourish, secondary school chaplaincy services must be well integrated into the school's structure in terms of personnel, space and time allocation, financing, *et al.*

5. Further characteristics of secondary school chaplaincy

i. A collaborative model of ministry

A secondary school chaplaincy leader is called to collaborative ministry. This needs to be understood in two ways.

First, chaplaincy as a service within the Catholic school is part of a set, a web of interventions, activities, processes and persons who, together, seek to realize the school's mission. In fact, chaplaincy is a natural partner of religious education. We also need to recognize how teachers in various curricular disciplines contribute to the faith life of students. The development of specific course profiles for Catholic secondary schools in Ontario has given impetus to the integration of the Christian faith across the curriculum. Much still needs to be done in this area, and chaplaincy leaders can be key resource people in this task.

What is more, the Principal of a Catholic secondary school is first to be entrusted with the responsibility of building the school community as an intentional community focused on Jesus-Christ. In the development of just and harmonious relationships between all, in the fostering of respectful approaches to discipline, in the setting up of just and humane policies, in the implementation of a Christ-centred character development initiative, secondary school principals and their collaborators carry out this responsibility. Chaplaincy services are a key partner in this work. They are not called to replace school administrators in this area of responsibility, but to collaborate closely with them in seeing to its successful realization.

As has been noted, chaplaincy is one of many necessary approaches to ensuring the Catholicity of a school. In this first sense, then, chaplaincy leaders are called to collaboration in this undertaking.

There is a second sense in which they must be team players: in carrying out their specific mandate, they should develop a collaborative approach where they call on others' gifts, seek their wisdom and entrust them with responsibility for certain tasks. In other words, chaplaincy leaders should be real leaders, inspiring a common vision, empowering others to act, leading by example and encouraging those that work with them.

They are to call upon students and staff in planning, coordinating, carrying out and evaluating the various projects and services which make up a secondary school chaplaincy service. Even in that most private area known as spiritual accompaniment, it is desirable that a team approach be developed, wherein the gifts of others are recognized, be it staff or students, as they set up peer ministry networks. The sign of a successful chaplaincy leader will be the presence of dynamic, vibrant chaplaincy teams within the school.

ii. A multi-faceted ministry

Traditional typologies of ministry have focused on the three Old Testament figures of the priest, the prophet and the king. Recognizing in Christ the fulfillment of these figures, and considering that through baptism and confirmation we are configured to Christ, we can establish a three-fold pattern for ministry within the Church in the areas of Sacrament (priest), Word (prophet) and Community (king).

Each of these areas in turn can be seen from two points of view: the Church gathered by baptism and the Church sent by confirmation.

Gathered by baptism, the Church prays and celebrates the sacraments (priest), breaks open and assimilates the Word (prophet) and grows in mutual love (king).

Sent by the Spirit of confirmation, the Church brings to the world the witness of a holy life rooted in prayer (priest), shares with the world the Good News of Jesus-Christ (prophet) and commits itself to solidarity in building a world capable of reflecting God's own love (king).

The following table illustrates this typology of ministry:

	Baptism – Gathered	Confirmation – Sent
Priest	Liturgy	Witness
Prophet	Catechesis	Evangelization
King	Community	Solidarity

Here are some chaplaincy activities that exemplify this multi-faceted ministry:

Liturgy:

- Graduation mass
- Thanksgiving celebration
- Memorial service for a deceased student

Catechesis

- Bible-study group
- Staff professional development day
- Retreat

Community

- Fund-raising drive for a student in need
- “Say no to drugs” campaign
- Celebration for retiring teacher

Witness

- Participation in a community-wide non-violence project
- Presence at a pro-life rally
- Column in the local newspaper

Evangelization

- School-based RCIA group
- Twinning with a mission
- Distribution of prayer leaflets

Solidarity

- Development and Peace school-based group
- Social justice walk
- Participation in community-development project

This list, which is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, only serves to illustrate the many shapes that secondary school chaplaincy can take. It invites chaplaincy leaders and school leaders to critically evaluate past projects and plan for future ones as chaplaincy services embrace a broad spectrum of ministry.

iii. An essential ministry

The members of the Education Commission of the OCCB want to echo the conviction of past members of the Commission and of the OCCB itself: chaplaincy services are essential to a Catholic secondary school.

The preceding paragraphs illustrate the broad range and complexity of the tasks which are set before a chaplaincy leader. We cannot imagine a Catholic secondary school responding adequately to this responsibility without someone being entrusted with its realization. That person must be freed from other responsibilities to take up this task whole-heartedly. That person must have the necessary training and formation to exercise true leadership in this ministry. That person must have the requisite status, budget and cooperation if that leadership is to be fruitful.

We believe that it is important that Catholic school boards and Catholic secondary schools regularly evaluate the importance they give to this essential component of the education process and the way that importance is reflected in the implementation of that service in the school.

We recognize the budgetary challenges that school boards face in terms of providing all the necessary services, including chaplaincy services, to their school communities. It is acknowledged that difficult choices must often be made. Yet the fundamental importance of chaplaincy services for our schools compels us to make these choices, to find creative ways of budgeting and organizing that will allow for their full flowering.

6. Chaplaincy as a profession: sharing best practices

The members of the Education Commission of the OCCB believe that in order to promote secondary school chaplaincy as a profession, educational partners need to review such areas as job descriptions, required competencies and attendant formation, working conditions and compensation, supervision and evaluation and promote an approach to these issues that can be shared collaboratively across the province.

We should all strive to bring about the day when:

prospective chaplaincy leaders know the formation programs that will allow them to acquire the competencies needed for these positions, enabling them to offer their services to any board in the province;

post-secondary institutions have established programs leading to the acquisition of such competencies, responding to the needs of all boards across the province;

supervisory officers and principals know precisely what is expected of chaplaincy leaders and continue to develop commonly held best practices in evaluation, supervision and ongoing formation;

chaplaincy leaders themselves are treated equally and justly across the province, and collaborate in developing resources and strategies that can be shared from board to board;

bishops and pastors are assured that those involved in these essential positions appreciate the ecclesial nature of their ministry, and are well-qualified, committed and doing work which bears fruit.

In order to attain these goals, we encourage our various provincial partner associations to study these issues and strengthen collaborative efforts to identify best practices and implement them across our province.

A. Standards of formation

Concerning formation, the Commission would like to offer the following advice.

Some candidates for chaplaincy leader positions are rich in experience but limited in formal training; others have accumulated many credits and certificates but have little practical experience in pastoral settings; yet others are on a personal faith journey that has

fostered a desire for service in our Catholic schools but lack past involvement in Church life. We need formation programs that will assess candidates' prior learning, help them identify their personal goals and offer particular pathways that will correspond to their needs.

Three components should be part of all formation programs leading to qualification for these positions.

i. First component: theological formation

Chaplaincy leaders must know the fundamental elements of the Christian faith within the Catholic tradition, be able to express and articulate them, and desire always to deepen this knowledge. Content should include credited courses in theology in the following areas:

- Fundamental and dogmatic theology (including Christology and sacramental theology)
- Exegesis and Biblical theology
- Moral theology, including social doctrine
- Church history
- Spirituality.

The commission would encourage the explicit recognition of degrees and certificates that correspond to these criteria.

ii. Second component: pastoral intervention

Chaplaincy leaders must learn not only the “why” but also the “how” of pastoral work: how to facilitate a group, how to prepare a workshop, how to sustain commitment, how to succeed in team collaboration, how to prepare a liturgy, etc. Content should include the following:

- Pastoral theology
- Liturgy
- Spirituality
- Catechesis
- Youth Ministry
- Applied psychology and sociology (including personal accompaniment, group dynamics and facilitation, pedagogy, personality theory, communication skills, conflict resolution, management)

The key to this pastoral formation lies in collaborative ministry, in which the candidate learns to work with others, sharing responsibility and decision making, appreciating others' gifts and limits, becoming leaders of a community of faith and service.

iii. Third component: spiritual integration and practice of the faith

Spiritual integration favours the synthesis of all the other elements of formation. It involves a deepening of prayer life, occasions to share faith, strengthening of liturgical and sacramental involvement, growth in discernment. Issues arising from one's personal life history need to be addressed and integrated. Candidates should be open to spiritual direction, psychological evaluation and group work. Retreats should be an integral part of this third component. Spiritual integration will eventually help develop one's conscience and ecclesial belonging (*sentire cum ecclesia*) while grounding ministry in collaboration with Christ in the Spirit, as members of his Body, in solidarity with all those who struggle for a more just and caring world. It leads to the development of what could be called a "pastoral identity." This process of spiritual integration is greatly facilitated when it is part of the formation program from the start and is firmly integrated into the theological and pastoral components.

B. Other considerations

As a norm, the bishops of Ontario do not give pastoral mandates to secondary school chaplaincy leaders. Such a mandate would imply supervisory and evaluative duties on the part of the bishops as well as the power to revoke the mandate when necessary – all elements that are lacking in the present situation. This does not mean that the bishop's office should not be involved in the discernment process. Candidates should be required to present a pastoral reference including a "nihil obstat" from the bishop's office, based on interviews with the candidate, study of their dossier and consultation of other references.

Some type of "internship" within the formation program is highly desirable, either during the time of formal course work or immediately afterwards. Confronting concrete situations and relating to specific individuals allows candidates to test and refine their new knowledge and to learn from experience. Learning a school's story, understanding its place in the life of the local Church and being involved in the realization of its mission statement are all part of developing a correct *sensus ecclesiae*. To be truly fruitful, such internship needs to be supervised and evaluated. Mentoring would be an important component of this internship.

Ongoing evaluation in its various forms – group, self, peer, supervisory – plays an important role in the discernment process, both for the candidate and the school board. It can only do so, however, when the objectives of evaluation are clear for all. Among these objectives will be listed academic achievement and mastery of skills, obviously; but more subjective elements also need to be assessed: the candidates' attitudes, beliefs, compassionate awareness and leadership abilities.

In-service training should be addressed by the boards. Workshops, courses, days of formation and retreats should be offered on an ongoing basis to foster learning and formation of chaplaincy leaders. Diocesan pastoral services can collaborate in developing such activities. Provincial networks can also play an invaluable role in this regard.

Conclusion

The Education Commission of the OCCB has endeavoured in this letter to present foundational considerations about secondary school chaplaincy that will help develop greater cohesion and strength in this ministry across our province. Our call for provincial collaboration should be seen in this light, as one element among others that will help our Catholic schools to better realize their mission in our Church and society.

The members of the Commission look forward to working with the provincial associations involved in Catholic education in moving these proposals forward, for the good of our youth and the greater glory of God.

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