

A Community of Story: Putting Flesh on Our Faith

“In the beginning and at the end, we are story.
Holy Family is a wonderful community of story!”
(Gwen Keith, Director of Education)

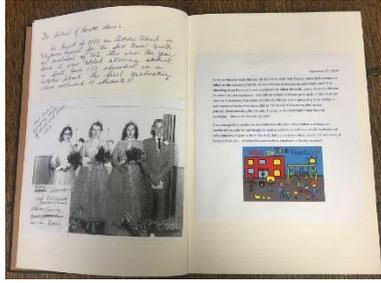
How exactly does one go about putting flesh on their faith? Especially when it involves elementary school children! Holy Family RCSSD #140 determined during the spring months of the last school year that 2019-20 would be the time to focus on the stories that demonstrate well-rounded development of our youth and their faith. We were convinced that we had not completely explored our previous theme, *We Are Community*, recognizing that there were a number of stories yet to tell.

The celebration of the theme began with the hosting of the school-based administrators at our annual retreat. Nested in the Moose Mountain setting at Kenosee Lake, we were inspired to think about the ‘big rocks’ of our faith by creating an oil painting that would be displayed in each of our sites throughout the year. The personal touch of each administrator crafting and completing their painting has had significant meaning in the schools and central office. Each individual really had to put have ‘flesh’ in the activity and challenge themselves to put personal perceptions on canvas for all to know. Each has received compliments and questions about the artwork allowing them to share the experience, tell the story and add to the faith environment of the building – definitely a moment of putting flesh (our living self) on the faith aspect of our Catholic Schools. Some locations even seized the suggestion and created images of their own!



Superintendent Terry Jordens demonstrates the strong foundation of the Trinity that we humans can be sure our love is secure upon.

Also shared on that day was a beautiful journal full of blank pages just waiting to be filled with the stories about the moments of faith development and growth in character found within our division. Throughout the year, these journals have been added to, opened and displayed for many to read and enjoy the capturing of the moments that might go un-noticed as one is busy instructing and disciplining and facilitating all of the learning experiences we create for our students. There definitely is big, hard data in education. We like to think of these stories as the soft, small data that matters just as much!



Imagine discovering, through the focus on the theme, just how small the graduating class of some of our schools was in 1955.

In the month of October 2018, Holy Family RCSSD #140 was blessed to host the Catholic School Divisions of the province for their annual convention and meeting of the trustees who serve on the Boards of Education. Generating content and celebrations for the event was not a challenge at all once it was determined that a theme similar to the one we were already enjoying would work well. *Sharing Stories of Our Fruitful Harvest* became a way for Holy Family to continue developing our own theme. The journals, now rich with content, were included in the conference for all of the province to enjoy. Each division was invited to create and bring a journal of their own and, indeed, those too were rich with the moments we pray for and dream of in Catholic Education. One of the local educators was even inspired to generate a story based on a story!



The year has continued with celebrations of mass, liturgical seasons and student achievement. Every opportunity to celebrate reinforces the growth and success of our children and their development of skills, abilities and understandings that will make them citizens we call neighbours, friends and fellow parishioners in the not too distant future.

Our St. Olivier Principal, Darrell Perras, reflects upon what it means to be a leader who witnesses the growth in faith of our young students, *"It's beyond heartwarming. Quite often it's seeing the growth in their relationships and how they treat people. This can be seen in their personal relationships, service they do in their community, who they pray for on a daily basis in their classrooms, etc. As they become stronger in their faith and love of Jesus, it truly affects who they are and how they live."*

As spring has sprung once again, we are looking forward to the 2019-20 school year and know that we have not yet achieved the full possibility that this theme has allowed

us. We will need to keep the journals handy to capture even more of the moments. We will need to celebrate community and all that we are blessed to have within each of the locations Holy Family serves. We will continue to recognize that, although we are many, we are one in faith.

In closing, one just needs to hear the thoughts of our Superintendents to understand the significant opportunities Holy Family provides for guiding our students in the growth of their faith:

“Observing and listening to Grade 2 students as they journey through their faith is an enlightening experience. These students get the opportunity to deeply learn for the first time about reconciliation, communion, and confirmation. The questions and stories that come from this learning allow me, as an educational leader and parent of a son in Grade 2, to see and explore our faith again with new eyes. The opportunity in the spring to have first communion and to be confirmed is a guiding experience for these students as they grow in their faith. It is a cause for celebration!” (Terry Jordens)

“For me their is not a specific single event... although the liturgical seasons provide many opportunities. For me the most meaningful moments are the ones when God reveals himself to us in the simplest, but often most profound ways... if we are open to it and look for or recognize it. For example, in the moment when a student is sad and another student recognizes s/he is hurting and comes to their aid... seeing the joy the student gets from helping their classmate... and then taking the moment to ask the helper how that made them feel and then helping them to recognize that the warm feeling inside of them is their Christ Light shining!!!” (Chad Fingler)

Putting ‘flesh on our faith’ is not a problem at all but instead a blessing for the students and staff of Holy Family RCSSD #140.