

Nurturing Faith at Home *Your Child's Religious Studies Program*

The education of our children has always been a partnership of parents and teachers, of home and school. In Catholic schools, a third party becomes integral in forming and nurturing the child: the Church. The Catholic Church, however, recognizes that parents are the first or primary educators of their children. Within an atmosphere of love, parents provide for their children in all areas of growth: intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual. As people of faith, the last area – the spiritual – can, perhaps, be the most challenging. All the more necessary that home, school, and parish work together on this important, but sometimes neglected, part of your child's formation! Together we must consciously nurture the faith life of your children. Welcome to this partnership!

For some children the teaching of faith begins many years before any formal catechetical instruction in school. However, the role of the family in the faith formation of their children does not end when children begin school. It is vital that parents journey with their children in an ongoing way. The fact that parents do not always have the understanding of the faith – and the resources and the support that are needed – is the reason for this addition to your child's monthly school newsletter. This column is meant to *inform* and *encourage* you in your role as a faith-builder. As scary or as difficult as it may be, your efforts in this area will be very rewarding.

The school takes its part in your child's religious formation very seriously. They use the religious studies programs that are written by the National Office of Religious Education in Ottawa and approved by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). The programs build on each other and include well-developed teacher manuals, student texts, and recorded music to supplement instruction. The following is an overview of the catechesis your child has received and will receive at school. It is intended to provide the 'big picture' regarding religious instruction in our Catholic schools.

The overall objective of catechesis, as described in the General Directory for Catechesis, is "to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ." To this end, the **kindergarten** program, *In God's Image*, addresses the spirituality of young children through God's creation. Students celebrate their own uniqueness, the wonder of the earth, and the gift of friends. The primary programs (Grades 1 – 3) focus on our relationship with a Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Spirit. In the **Grade 1** program, *We Belong to God*, they celebrate their belonging to the family of God, the Creator of all things. The **Grade 2** program, *We Belong to the Lord Jesus*, extends the belonging theme into a relationship with Jesus, especially through the Eucharist. This is the year when many of the children receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion. The content of the **Grade 3** program, *In the Spirit We Belong*, is the Holy Spirit, Who gathers us as followers of Jesus.

The Grades 4 – 6 programs repeat the themes of the primary years, at a higher level of understanding. In the **Grade 4** program, *Come and See*, the children meet the Lord Jesus through the Gospels and explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus today. Each student receives a gift from the school: their own bible. The **Year 5** program, *May We Be One*, explores what the Church does as it gives witness to Jesus in the Spirit. The **Year 6** program, *You Shall Be My Witnesses*, explores how young Christians are witnesses of God's justice and love.

The junior high program is a three-year series called *Together We Are Strong*. Each program in the series is grounded in Scripture, incorporates various forms of prayer, and offers opportunities for decision-making. In the **Grade 7** program, entitled *Believe in Me*, students delve into the first part of the Apostles Creed, studying one article of faith at a time. In **Year 8**, *Stand by Me*, students continue their study of the Creed, focusing on the last part of the prayer and our belief in the Holy Spirit and the holy catholic Church. Finally, in *Be With Me*, the **Grade 9** program, students grow in their understanding of what it means to live their faith as disciples of Christ. The Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments are closely examined as a guide to Christian living.

Students in **Grade 10** study *Christ and Culture*, exploring our culture and contemporary issues in light of Christ's teachings and the teachings of the Church. They learn how, as young persons, they can shape their culture and celebrate it. In **Grade 11**, students use the Alberta Youth Search for Meaning program, an exploration of how believing is essential to our existence. The program incorporates the belief structures within the Catholic Church and other world religions. The **Grade 12** program is called *In Search of the Good – A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*. Using Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, students explore ethics and morality and the distinction between the two. Different world religions are studied in each of the high school programs.

Additional information is available through your child's teacher or through me. In the upcoming months, I invite you to read *Nurturing Faith At Home* for information and encouragement as you – with God – endeavor to lead your children on their faith journey.