



OCSTA News

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38

It has always struck me that Advent is such a wonderful time of anticipation. We wait for the Lord at this time of the year and celebrate together with family, friends and our communities the blessed hope of Jesus' coming. Advent, however, also gives us pause to reflect on the meaning of Christmas and by extension the meaning of our own lives. Personally, I am humbled by the greatest gift ever given and thankful for the grace that accompanies faith in Jesus Christ but as I walk through the malls and listen to the radio, I do have times of melancholy....wondering if all this rushing around just masks the collective emptiness of our world's soul. This time of year also gives pause to remember those who are no longer with us, whether that is family, friends, community members, students or colleagues. In the busyness of our school communities, do you ever ponder the meaning of what we do?

In the March/April 2008 issue of the *OCSTA NEWS*, I shared a story of two students who played the most marvelous April fool's joke on their fathers. (See our website under publications) These boys were often in trouble at school but their love of life and their willingness to collaborate in this prank with their vice-principal was a breakthrough of sorts. The memory of this joke is highlighted for me by the fact that a year later they were killed together with one other friend in terrible car accident.

It may seem odd to you that I share this story at this time of Advent. I have been thinking about when and where to tell the story and there never seems to be an appropriate month. September is the launch of a new school year, October seems to need to be visionary, January and February are the dark months, March and April are "new beginning" times and at May or June, you wish to end with inspiration.

So I have chosen now, ADVENT, the time of "coming" or "arrival" to raise the issue of meaning.

When we are members of school communities, we are sometimes overwhelmed by the many stories of pain, hurt, loss, violence and betrayal. These incidents are well-documented in our schools, classrooms, offices, and hallways. They do not only involve educators and students; they can also involve colleagues, leaders, board trustees and community members. The temptation is to give up, walk away (or run), or to ignore our deepest sense of loss or fear or grief.

The good news of Jesus Christ's birth does give a choice on how to face the brokenness. This time of advent is a celebration of **HOPE**. Steven Garber, in his book, *Fabric of Faithfulness*, puts it this way.....
How is it possible to see into the meaning of one's moment in history and to act responsibly, rather than be overwhelmed by either cynicism or sorrow because the brokenness seems so deep, the pain so profound? In a certain sense, everything we do as human beings is rooted in that question. Decisions we make within families either nourish or destroy our connectedness. Choices we make about our vocations lead to deeper commitments or greater dissatisfaction. Attitudes we nurture about common good responsibilities cause us to either be more fully engaged or to retreat into the sphere of those who do not care. Day by day we are forming characters and forming cultures in the way we respond to the world around. If we are to avoid the paralysis of destructive cynicism and debilitating sorrow, somehow, somewhere, we have to make sense of the world--not only of our own lives, but of life.
In this time of Advent, the time when we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ, the coming of reconciliation, we are called to work toward the Second Advent, where we are held accountable for our faithfulness. We are called, as educators, to continue to make sense of the world not only for ourselves but for our students and perhaps for our communities. This is not an easy task and not one that can be entered into glibly where we just tell ourselves that everything will be alright.

Working through the loss of three of my former students has taken a long time. Finding purpose and meaning in their loss may take me the rest of my life. But perhaps we can make sense of this by becoming people of character. We commit ourselves to "the other"; we engage ever more firmly in our responsibilities and continue to develop connections to our neighbours whomever they may be; we work together to build communities of shalom, we live for justice, reconciliation, truth, love and respect.....Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a child, he died for our shortcomings and sin, he offers us hope each and every day. He offers us restoration and reconciliation. In this season, I pray that each of us lean not on our own understanding but on the faith and the conviction that God loves us, cares for us and will continue to hold us close to him even in the turbulent times of our lives. We may never have "the answer" but we hang on to the promises of God to love us no matter what and we continue to ask God to find us faithful.

May you all have a most blessed Christmas season! *Shalom, Diane*

**Just as hope
Rings through laughter,
it can also
shine through tears.**

Inspired by Maya Angelou

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EDUCATORS HELPING EDUCATORS (PROVINCIAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES)

At the 2009 OCSTA Educators Convention, a new initiative was launched called *Educators Helping Educators*. This series of workshops was organized by grade level for the elementary panel and by discipline for the secondary panel. This first step initiative was planned and organized by ensuring that facilitators were given support and information about the purpose and direction of these newly formed professional learning communities.

Professional Learning Communities (or PLCs) are at the forefront of visionary educational reform and change. Authors such as Andy Hargreaves (*The Fourth Way*) and Michael Fullan (*Leading in a Culture of Change*) have researched and argued that the only way to ensure true institutional change is through professional learning communities. To quote Hargreaves.....

Three principles of professionalism are indispensable components of any sustainable change:

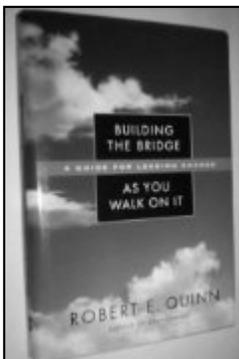
- ◆ Highly qualified *teachers* who are attracted by their country's inspiring and inclusive vision; have high status as builders of their nation's future; enjoy supportive working conditions, sufficient pay, and professional autonomy; and are trained to a rigorous intellectual and practical standard.
- ◆ *Powerful professionalism* in which teachers' associations become profound agents of systemic change that benefits students, not only opponents or implementers of changes imposed on them by others.
- ◆ Lively *learning communities* in which teachers learn and improve together in cultures of collaboration, trust, and responsibility

The “Educators Helping Educators” provincial professional learning communities are being developed through a cooperative effort by OCSTA and the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and will also need support and leadership from the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association (principals are a key factor in the implementation of school change and reform). The **first step** is the setup of an online community for educators. This could be an EHE Grade 1 group or an EHE French Educators group or an EHE Vice-Principals group where topics of mutual concern are discussed or resources shared to the group. The possibilities are only limited by the numbers of suggestions and the committed core of educators who act as facilitators and mentors.

The challenge will be to develop core groups of educators committed to this initiative who are willing to take shared leadership in furthering the ideas, resources, developing questions and encouraging conversations. These facilitators will need support and encouragement from both OCSTA and the OACS and time to meet either face to face or virtually to develop “next steps”.

The **second step** will be to listen to the educators in the classrooms. Theory needs to be connected to practice. One might have a good theory as to how to teach reading or writing or arithmetic but feedback is needed from the grassroots (aka the teacher in the trenches) as to the success or failure of a particular method. To this end, the EHE groups will need educators who have the time to research new educational trends and who will challenge and lead in ways of education. The Education Department of Redeemer University College or Tyndale University College could be invited to join the EHE groups to watch, learn and initiate conversation of mutual benefit. The provincial organizations who work with classroom educators (OACS and OCSTA) would need to “hear” and “listen” to educators and provide workshops, courses, professional development and curriculum opportunities to groups of educators who need more than an online conversation.

The **third step** would be to set up a mutual site where resources, ideas, books, articles, curriculum are shared and posted to the benefit of the member schools and educators of the OACS and OCSTA. This would require cooperation, collaboration and mutual trust on the parts of provincial organizations.



The possibilities are exciting. There will be a need for visioning, energy, and hope! As we carefully move forward, educators will be invited to join in the journey, and to give suggestions for these new next steps. We will be as Robert Quinn's book title states...***Building the Bridge as You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change.***

Submitted by Diane Stronks

SHARING STORIES OF REMARKABLE EDUCATORS

"Hebrews 12:1 "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off the everything that hinders....and let us run with perseverance the race marked out of us."

This month begins a feature where we begin to tell stories about those educators who have gone on before us, mentoring us, encouraging us and enabling us. Some of these stories will show the power of the mentor, some will describe a remarkable educator but hopefully all will encourage us to reflect on our own journeys in education and remember those who have influenced and lead us to where we are now.

Please contact the OCSTA office if you wish to share your story of a remarkable educator in an upcoming newsletters.

Our first story is submitted by Brent Smeenck, an educator at Quinte Christian High School, Belleville and the chair of OCSTA's Promotion and Membership Committee.

It was midterm in the spring semester of 1995. I was eighteen years old. As you know, in those days, high school students had to take 5th year OAC courses in order to be eligible for university. I had already applied to several universities and was eager to hear back from them regarding acceptance. One of the classes in which I was enrolled at that time was History OAC.

For reasons that defy all logic and wisdom, I chose to drop History OAC. As a result I finished the year with only five OAC credits, rendering me ineligible to be accepted by the universities to which I applied. This story is a snap shot that captures part of who I was back then.

It was during this confused and sometimes chaotic time in my life that my History teacher played a significant and valuable role. I distinctly remember the struggle that I had between deep unanswered questions and the desire to look like I had it all together. My internal world was a battle ground where manhood and boyhood fought for territory and boyhood had a well established stronghold on most of the real estate. I believe it was Chap Clark who said that every person needs five significant relationships with non-parent adults in order to fully grow and develop through their teen years. My History teacher was one of my five.

The channel through which that teacher's impact came was a grace based relationship. He seemed to like me despite dropping his class against his clear disapproval. After rejecting his advice and ignoring his warnings he still seemed to enjoy playing basketball with me at lunch. This unconditional acceptance and kindness blessed me in ways that I could not have articulated then, but certainly see the fruits of now. By meeting deep needs in my heart for that kind of acceptance he carved out a path of growth that lead me closer to manhood.

I remember the school-wide cake eating contest during which he was seated next to me. His competitive nature knew no bounds, from sports to eating cake. It wasn't until the contest was almost over that I realized he had been secretly tossing pieces of his cake onto my plate. I still won. His healthy competitive nature, the work ethic he displayed as a teacher, and the freedom he had to enjoy life effect many of the choices I make today as a teacher. His example remains a role-model in my memory as I navigate my own life as a teacher. He showed me that a love for academics and sports are not polar opposites but can co-exist harmoniously. He showed me that you can be mature and have fun. He showed me that the bigger picture, a wider perspective, includes both deep concern that students make wise choices, and grace that allows them the freedom to make and learn from mistakes.

I am profoundly grateful for my History teacher. I also hope that the story of his impact on my life will bless and encourage the teacher's that read this.

- Brent Smeenck

(A Graduate of Quinte Christian High School in Belleville, Brent Smeenck went on to study Psychology at Dordt College, then Physical Education and Education at Calvin College. He currently works for Quinte Christian High School where he is the guidance counselor and a physical education teacher. He, his wife Lauren and their two sons enjoy reading Richard Scary books and are looking forward to skating on the backyard ice rink this winter).

BOOK REVIEWS

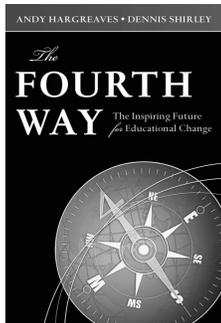
As we move into the 21st century, Christian educators are encouraged to seek out the best experience and research when it comes to leading their school. Here are two of the best books on leadership, change, and education.

'Leading in a Culture of Change' by Michael Fullan:

...offers valuable insights into the dynamics of change...full of illustrative case examples, exercises and resources

...easy to read and understand

"This is a book for all would-be heads of department and deputy heads.



The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley:

This book analyzes three previous major change efforts, outlines their strengths and limitations, and offers a successful and sustainable fourth way to integrate teacher professionalism, community engagement, government policy, and accountability.



BUILDING COMMUNITY WITHIN OUR MEMBERSHIP

Pray With Us

We express our condolences to **Janet Miedema** (Calvin Christian School, Dundas) on the passing of her mother, Jean Miedema. Jean was called home to be with her Lord on Thursday, November 19, 2009 at the West Haldimand Hospital, Hagersville.

Celebrate With Us:

Congratulations to Tanya and **Joe Smits** (Sarnia Christian School) on the safe arrival of their baby girl, Kayla Nicole Smits, born November 28, 2009. What an amazing blessing children are.

Calendar of Events

November 19	OCSTA Board	December 2-5	California Roundtable-Cardus
November 23	OCSTA Promotion and Membership Committee	December 3 & 4	CSI Pension and Insurance Trustee Meeting
November 24	Heritage Christian School, Lindsay Membership-Restorative Justice	December 7	Educators Helping Educators Facilitators 5:30-7 p.m. RUC
November 26	OACS School Policy Committee	December 8	Coordinating Meeting
November 27	OACS High School Curriculum Coordinators/Designers	December 10	Convention Standing Committee meeting
November 27	Retirement Celebration for Adrian Guldmond	January 14	OCSTA BOD Executive and Conference Call
November 28	Trinity Christian School, Burlington Board-Personnel Manual and Best Practises for Employment with Ray Hendriks	January 18	OCSTA Promotion and Membership Meeting
		January 21/22	OACS High School Principals

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