



OCSTA News



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

----- IMAGINATION

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In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. Acts 2: 17-18

A number of years ago, I received a large poster of Albert Einstein playing his violin on the backdrop of the starry universe. The caption on the poster read *Imagination is more important than knowledge*. I have wondered about the truth of Einstein's saying, but as time has marched on I have come to agree with his wisdom. He is not saying that knowledge isn't important but that imagination is more important.

When we are free to imagine how things might be different and to dream of a better future, we are not focused on grumbling about the now. I think imagining is a daring and risky task. It is thinking 'outside the box' as the popular saying goes. It is having the courage to name the issues that are not the way they ought to be because you imagine they could be different. When the apostle Peter speaks the above words in Acts, he is describing a time when all followers of Christ dare to dream, dare to imagine a new future, dare to hope!

We confess that we are not in charge of the universe, the world, or even the daily events of our lives. We try to live faithfully in this world, and included in that faithfulness is continually naming (or if you wish, prophesying) the hope that we have in God. It is this audacity (of hope) that sustains us. In our work with each other and with our students, we need to be continually hopeful, even when things do not look hopeful. We know that God is faithful, and we need to pray for the Spirit's power and wisdom so that we continue to be faithful.

To have imagination means that we playfully engage God's wonderful creation (and creatures). To have imagination means that we grow in every area of our life (even our teaching!). Leland Ryken's book, *The Christian Imagination; Essays on Literature and the Arts*, has much to teach us about approaches to the imagination and faith.

Do you not love art, music, theatre, drama, poetry, literature and all the fine arts? Do you **only** emphasize the practical, skill-based, applicable, useful and workable? I believe that we are called to imagine and dream with our students. To imagine and dream (**and** work hard to realize) means we dance and sing and play everyday, in our lives and in our schools. Free to dream and free to create and free to imagine and free to wonder and free to connect, what are you waiting for?

"I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge—myth is more potent than history—dreams are more powerful than facts—hope always triumphs over experience—laughter is the cure for grief—love is stronger than death."

*-Robert Fulghum, Author
All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*

Blessings, Diane

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Teaching Christianly in Christian Schools

A Thousand Words of Gratitude for the Graces of Teaching in Good Places

(**Doug Schulz** has been teaching English at HDCH since 2005.

He presently heads the Languages Department. Doug has served as a teacher or minister since 1979. He also does some freelance writing.

For a spiritual discipline, he journals a thousand words a day.)



The term “Christianly” was never used by the principal or members of the Education Committee in the interview process for my first teaching job in a Christian school. It was 1979 at Beacon Christian High in St. Catharines.

John Lennon was still alive, Joe Clark was still a contender, and Jerry Seinfeld was not yet a sit-com star satirizing North American urban inanity.

Early that year, while I was completing a B.Ed. with an English major at University of Western Ontario, my wife spotted in the London newspaper Beacon’s ad for a history teaching position. My B.A. had included ‘gobs’ of history, classics, and religious studies, so I plopped my resume into the mail with the required “Personal Philosophy of Christian Education” essay attached. I quite enjoyed articulating that document, melding together theological reflections from several years’ Christian college education – first at the evangelical Briercrest Bible School in Saskatchewan in the early ‘70s and then at the Mennonite Brethren College and the Religious Studies Department of the University of Winnipeg later that decade. Beacon principal John Vriend soon phoned, inviting me for an interview and commenting that my philosophical perspective was impressive for a person who had no experience in the Calvinist-rooted Christian school movement. At my interview I said that I wanted to be a pretty open-minded but deeply devoted follower of Jesus, and that I hoped to teach students that way, but that I was eagerly anticipating furthering my theological development through a teaching experience in this “culture.”

I was hired. My colleagues turned out to be wonderful people, but my experience in the first couple of months in the classroom was often dreadful. As a new teacher, I – not my lesson plans – often became fresh meat for that unfortunate phenomenon students develop in the presence of rookie educators, called “barracuda brain.” Also, I was the first Mennonite hired. The fact that I’d answer my rowdies’ biting taunts (the “i. y. a. Dutch, y. a. much” piece) with defensive assertions indicating that my forebears were Dutchmen-onite marshmallows toasted on cross-shaped sticks by their long-dead kin....Well, that did not ameliorate the situation. So when I heard “Christianly” uttered repeatedly from lips at lecturns and woven wonderfully around the loop of workshop circle chatter at the OCSTA Convention that fall, I lamented that the ideology of the system was long on intellect but short on capacity to inculcate individual respect of differences.

I’ve changed my mind over the past 30 years. Not about the challenge of guiding students to act Christianly in the classroom toward teachers as authority figures (can you tell I’m now in my 50’s?) and with one another in all the psycho-social-sexual aspects of their development. But about the assumption I’d made that the ideas of Christian education were better on paper than in the politics of interpersonal engagement – from classroom encounters to cultural interactions in all the spheres of the good old PERSIATE model: politics, economics, religion, social systems, intellectual systems, aesthetic considerations, technologies, and – of course - education.

I taught four fantastic years at Beacon, growing to love my colleagues and students most Christianly! I mean, I was deeply moved – intellectually and volitionally - by the intensity with which the mantra “all truth is God’s truth” was carried into curricula and conversation. It fuelled an evidently consistent drive to examine what it means to let Christ be Lord over all dimensions of life within our created existence, where the sovereignty of God was to be observed, respected, and embraced with a mission – to make Christ known in real terms in our time. Sure, I’d bicker with my students about whether my going to a restaurant with my wife’s Mennonite parents on a Sunday after church was a sin worse than the way their parents stepped out onto church steps after services to light up cigarettes (thereby completely nullifying the purported benefit of peppermints consumed at the outset of sermons!). But such differences aside, we were engaged in ways of understanding what the John Lennons and Joe Clarks and Jerry Seinfelds of the world had to do with Jesus Christ. It was actually rather heady stuff, not trivial, not pedantic, not irrelevant, and not easy to appropriate into practice – sinful nature being what it is. In any case, my philosophizing appetite was satisfied even as my evangelical conviction about brokenness and redemption was amplified greatly through consideration of Calvinist applications I encountered by reading choice bits of Van Prinsterer, Dooyeweerd, Seerveld, Woltersdorf, et.al. Lives were touched (mine too) in the grappling we all did those days with the meaning of being Christian.

After Beacon I went to a Mennonite seminary in Indiana with thoughts of entering full-time pastoral ministry. But following graduation in 1985, I felt drawn to the world of education again. My wife and I and our young family moved back to Winnipeg where I worked as Registrar and Recruitment Director for the Mennonite Brethren College for a couple of years, then for five more years as a history, English, and Bible teacher at the large Mennonite high school in Winnipeg to which Calvin Christian academic grads came to finish high school – before Calvin added senior high grades. Calvin kids were often my faves (should a teacher say such?), since they’d been reasonably well prepared to be great wrestlers with the big issues, setting a standard for the Menno youth to aspire toward. And aspire we did! I loved (nurtured insidiously) the brain-battles, pitting the Word-versus- World mentality of the Anabaptists against the Word-transforming-World approach of the Calvinists. [I’m still not at peace on this; I think my malaise in the matter preserves my Mennonite humility (passive-aggressive). In any case, Jesus loves me, this I know.]

In 1992, after years of invitations to pastoral posts by various Mennonite congregations, I responded. For the next 13 years, I was a minister – terms of four and five years in congregations, with four years between as a hospital chaplain to all denominations, religions, beliefs and doubts. However, often I felt an inner nudge to return to the classroom. In spring of 2005 I resigned at my church in Vineland - having no teaching job to go to but fertile faith I’d find one. The second school I applied to hired me. Here I am at HDCH, teaching English, learning again from colleagues and students about doing it “Christianly.”

TO BE OF USE

(by Marge Piercy)

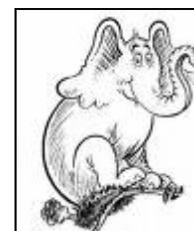
The people I love the best
 jump into work head first
 without dallying in the shallows
 and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
 They seem to become natives of that element,
 the black sleek heads of seals
 bouncing like half submerged balls.



I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
 who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
 who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
 who do what has to be done, again and again.



I want to be with people who submerge
 in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
 and work in a row and pass the bags along,
 who stand in the line and haul in their places,
 who are not parlor generals and field deserters
 but move in a common rhythm
 when the food must come in or the fire be put out.



The work of the world is common as mud.
 Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
 But the thing worth doing well done
 has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
 Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
 Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
 but you know they were made to be used.
 The pitcher cries for water to carry
 and a person for work that is real.

A colleague of mine shared this poem with our staff during one of our daily devotional times a couple of years ago. It has always stuck with me because it so beautifully describes the vocation of our lives. Even in the classroom or in the front office of a school, we know what it means to get into the mud, to experience the messiness of our lives and of our students' lives.

I came across it again in a wonderful book called "*Leading from within; Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Lead*," by editors Sam M. Intrator and Megan Scribner and with an introduction by Parker Palmer. I highly recommend the book!



The "**Elephant in the Room**" this month is the question of how you are sustained in your daily work, your daily leadership. Leadership is more than principles or practices—it requires heart, courage and wisdom, qualities that can be inspired and informed by poetry. All of us are leaders and leaders need to tell stories about who we are, what we do, and how we keep our heart and head and commitment alive. We need to tell stories of hope and inspiration but also stories of hurt and woundedness lest we give those around us the idea that everything is always alright and smooth sailing. We all sometimes trudge through the mud, faced with failure and isolation. We aspire to be intentional, reflective and self-aware. I invite you read Scripture and poetry and great stories.

May each of us feel God's pleasure in the work that we do!

— Diane

OCSTA Convention 2009**“Meet Me at the Well” John 4:14*****Educators helping Educators Series***

At this year's convention, the planning committee is introducing a series of workshops that we have called ***Educators helping Educators***. These workshops will be run on Friday morning, October 30, 2009. The idea behind this series is to further the idea of building collegial communities of learning. Many educators in OACS schools feel isolated and alone in their work. OCSTA is committed to building an association that hosts a collaborative network where grade 3 teachers as well as high school physics teachers have an opportunity to share/teach/collaborate with one another. There is such a huge potential and wealth of knowledge and imagination in our association! We believe that it is time to release the energy and experience and knowledge!

Just as we seek to enable, empower and coach our students to independence and leadership, OCSTA seeks to enable, empower and allow you the opportunities to teach and coach one another. Many educators might wonder if they actually have anything to share but as we know with our students, each child is multi-gifted, so we must encourage each other to collaborate, converse, network and share. The leaders in this series of workshops are not claiming that they are the **experts**. They are admitting that they can learn from their colleagues, but they are taking up a position of servant leadership to facilitate the sharing of ideas in their area or discipline. A rich community is built on the experience of the old and excitement of the new.

So...this is an invitation to YOU! The OCSTA convention planning committee needs teachers who are willing to facilitate workshops for:

Grade 3 Teachers (2 sessions)	Grade 6-8 Science Social (1 session repeated)
Split Grades (eg 1/2 or 2/3) (2 sessions)	Grade 6-8 Science (1 session repeated)
Grade 4 Teachers (2 sessions)	Grade 6-8 Language (1 session repeated)
Grade 5 Teachers (2 sessions)	Grade 6-8 Bible (1 session repeated)
Grade 6-8 Math (1 session repeated)	Various High School Disciplines (1 session each)

You will be given an outline of ideas and the types of activities that may be used. You may buddy up with another colleague! You will also organize the workshop into small groups where educators will be given the opportunity to share their needs, goals and difficulties in their particular grade or discipline. Your input and feedback will be shared with OCSTA and the OACS to help shape future professional development.

We are interested in your suggestions of names of teachers that you have admired in these areas and in the possibility of volunteering yourself. The OCSTA office cannot possibly know all the great teachers in our association and so we solicit your help!

Please contact Faith Boer or Diane Stronks at office@ocsta.org.

Calendar of Events

March 25	OCSTA Promotion and Membership Meeting	April 21	OCSTA Finance Committee
March 27	OACS Curriculum Coordinators	April 22	North Toronto Administrators Meeting
March 31	OCSTA Board Meeting	April 24	OCSTA PD Day, Bluewater-Strathroy
April 1	OACS/OCSTA Primary Curriculum Day, London	April 25	Christian Educators Journal, Grand Rapids
April 2	OACS/OCSTA Primary Curriculum Day, Hamilton	April 25	Special Education AQ Course, Redeemer University College
April 7	OCSTA/OCSAA Meeting	April 29	“Boys Adrift” Seminar by Leonard Sax
April 8	OACS/OCSTA Primary Curriculum Day, Barrie	May 1	OCSAA Meeting
April 9	OACS/OCSTA Primary Curriculum Day, Kingston	May 7-9	Christian Schools Canada, Edmonton
April 15	OCSAA Bluewater, Strathroy	May 12/13	CSI Pension and Insurance Board, Toronto
April 16	OACS School Policy Committee	May 20	Mediation Commission
April 17	OCSTA PD Day, Seaway-Kingston	May 26	OCSTA Professional Development Committee
April 20	OACS High School PD Day, Kings Christian Collegiate		

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