

Mario Pascucci
Address to Rotary Club on Catholic Education
April 30, 2009

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mario Pascucci and I am chair of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.

It is a privilege for me to speak to you today about a subject that is near and dear to my heart and which has been a major part of my life for more years that I can remember that subject is Catholic education.

Let me tell you a bit about myself before I begin.

I am a longtime resident of Mississauga, having lived in the Cawthra/Burnhamthorpe area for 32 years. I am a graduate of Humber College in Marketing and Funeral Services, York University in Business and Nippissing University where I hold a Masters degree in Education. I run an import/export business and sales agency and am a professor of marketing at George Brown College.

And ... since I believe in leaving absolutely no free time for myself, I have been a Catholic school trustee for 26 going on 27 years. I have been the chair of the board since 2008.

Let me tell you a bit about Dufferin-Peel to provide some context.

Dufferin-Peel is one of the largest school boards in Ontario and by extension, the country.

We are comparable in size to the Toronto Catholic board and as such we are the two largest Catholic boards in Ontario ...and again, by extension, the country.

We are one of the largest employers in the region with approximately 10,000 full time and part time employees.

Our 2009-10 budget is approximately three-quarters of a billion dollars.

We run approximately 1,400 buses each day.

Our jurisdiction extends some 2,700 square kilometers from Lake Ontario up into Dufferin County.

We represent 262,000 Catholic ratepayers.

We have 38 parishes within our boundaries.

We operate 145 schools...23 of which are secondary schools and 122 of which are elementary schools.

Our students have shown tremendous success in provincial EQAO test scores and consistently meet or exceed the provincial standard in all areas.

By all accounts, we are a significant player in the local community.

From a provincial context, Catholic schools in Ontario educate some 600,000 students and Catholic ratepayers represent approximately one-third of Ontario's tax revenue base.

So ...what is this thing called Catholic education and why is it different from the secular system?

Let's go back in time.

Catholic education has been a part of the education fabric in Ontario for over 170 years. In the early 1800s, there were Catholic schools in many cities, towns and townships. Catholic schools were fundamental to the early development of our region.

Catholic schools were formed as an expression of a world view that differed from other schools.

In Peel, Catholic schools existed before Confederation in Malton and Wildfield.

The British North America Act and Confederation in 1867 guaranteed the rights of Catholics to maintain a Catholic school system, a right to which we hold strongly ... a right that we will vigorously defend.

Our board, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board was formed in 1969 by the amalgamation of eight small local Catholic boards. We started with 27 schools and 9,000 students. This is in sharp contrast with the 145 schools and 88,000 students we serve today.

We celebrate our role as a partner in Ontario's world class education system. We believe that we bring a distinctive element to publicly funded education in Ontario and to the Dufferin-Peel region.

The goal of Catholic education is, and always has been, to ensure that, in a school culture infused with the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, our students achieve their full academic, physical, spiritual and emotional potential.

We do not simply teach religion as a course...the Gospel values are infused throughout all aspects of the curriculum.

Our schools remain a strong and integral part of Ontario's publicly funded school system. They are supported by a significant and vital infrastructure of Catholic organizations representing educators, clergy and parents.

Catholic education values human life as an integration of body, mind and spirit. Rooted in this vision, Catholic education fosters the search for knowledge as a lifelong spiritual and academic quest.

The expectations of Catholic graduates are described not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but in terms of values, attitudes and actions.

Catholic schools speak words about the sacredness of life, the beauty of love, the dignity of work and the importance of family. These teachings offer guidelines for human behaviour that flow from the Ten Commandments and the message of the Gospel.

We teach a consistent life ethic that encourages students to see the relationship among all the world's peoples, especially the marginalized and the disadvantaged.

We teach the protection of life at all stages; the sacredness of promises and the meaning of fidelity, particularly in marriage and the family.

Students learn the value of truth and respect for the beliefs of other people. They learn this within the context of a curriculum focused on academic excellence.

The pursuit of academic excellence has been a hallmark of Catholic education from its inception. The goal of Catholic schools is and always has been, to help all our students to achieve their full potential and to experience success, whatever their unique gifts, talents and challenges,

Dufferin-Peel graduates are active and often outstanding contributors to public life in Ontario and Peel. As leaders in politics, business, arts, education, health care and volunteer services, they make meaningful and important contributions to improving our community. Catholic education is firmly and historically imbedded in the social fabric of our community.

Last year, we conducted an extensive Strategic System Review where we surveyed parents and guardians, Catholic School Council members, senior students, recent graduates and pastors to get a sense of how we are doing in a whole host of areas, including meeting expectations, communicating, and holding true to our mission as a Catholic educational system. The response was consistent in terms of the theme of overwhelming satisfaction with the Catholic nature of our system. This tells us that we continue to be a viable, educational system that is meeting the needs of our community.

As we celebrate our 40th year as a consolidated Catholic school board in Dufferin County and Peel Region, we celebrate not only our tradition of excellence in Catholic education, we celebrate our history, our achievements, our students, staff and parishes ... we celebrate our community as well.

We are your friends, your neighbours and your colleagues. We have been so for 170 years and will be for many, many years to come.

Thank you.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.