

UNEARTHING THE ROOTS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Northeastern Catholic District School Board is proud to announce the public release of Tracing our Roots: A Historical Overview of the Northeastern Catholic District School Board. The booklet follows years of research by members of Catholic School Councils, staff, and the parish communities into the origins of their schools and boards.

Director of Education Paul Toffanello is proud that this initiative has generated such overwhelming evidence of the sacrifices and efforts of the founders of Catholic education across Northeastern Ontario. "It is inspiring to read about the contributions of parents, of teachers, of staff members, of sisters and brothers, of parish priests, and of trustees, who believed so strongly that children had a right to faith education that they spared no effort to build a system of which they can be proud," stated Toffanello. "Most notable is the support of our parishes and members of various religious orders, who served as teachers, sometimes for little to no pay, to ensure the integration of gospel values and of a spiritual dimension to learning. Each one of our communities has such a rich Catholic heritage, that we felt it necessary to preserve it by documenting it so that it can be shared for generations to come."



Tracing our Roots is full of historical data and amusing anecdotes. Many may remember seeing Father M.J. Scully in the late 50s riding his two-wheel bicycle down the streets of Timmins to convince families to enrol their children at the new Catholic secondary school. Others may have vivid memories of attending Kindergarten classes in church basements, because space was insufficient in the formal school buildings. What about the time the students in Kirkland Lake carried their desks, in the snow nonetheless, across the yard from St. Joseph and into their new classrooms at Sacred Heart? Readers will certainly be surprised to find out that in 1912, the land where Aileen Wright English Catholic School now stands in Cochrane was cleared by circus elephants!

The booklet is also a testament to the challenges that we faced and overcame in the name of Catholic education. These included limited financial resources, geographic disadvantages, economic hardships due to declining population, and physical setbacks, such as the destructive fire that incinerated the gymnasium at St. Anne English Catholic School in Iroquois Falls in the mid 1980s.

The first distribution of the document was made available to participants of the Catholic Symposium hosted by the Board on October 16th. The Board is now sharing this valuable publication with stakeholders of the Catholic education system.

Copies of Tracing Our Roots: A Historical Overview of the Northeastern Catholic District School Board may be obtained by contacting the Board at (705) 268-7443, and will be available on the Board web site at www.ncdsb.on.ca.

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