

A photograph of two young girls with dark hair, smiling warmly. The girl in the foreground is wearing a blue top and looking towards the camera. The girl in the background is slightly out of focus, also smiling. The background is a warm, blurred indoor setting, likely a classroom.

We Teach Lessons for Life

Because Life is the Test

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
Catholic  
Teachers  
ASSOCIATION

# ● What does it mean to be a Catholic teacher?

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We teach math and spelling, science and geography. But as Catholic teachers, we bring to these subjects a values-based lens. In all that we do, we promote values like fairness, compassion, respect, and concern for social justice and the environment.

This means a math lesson includes a discussion of income disparity, and a science lesson weaves in ethical considerations of cloning. We call these **Lessons for Life**.

It matters that in a highly commercialized world there exists a place for young people where personal and spiritual growth is not only permitted, but nurtured. Where students are actively encouraged to take up different perspectives and forge an ethical stance that is sensitive to cultural differences, while guided by fairness, empathy, and respect. In a world characterized by rapid social and technological change, where many of the jobs our young people will eventually undertake do not yet exist, it is important that students learn not only the skills that will prepare them for future work, but also skills that will help them to navigate an often challenging and interdependent society.



Catholic teachers prepare  
our students for the ultimate test: life.



We want our students to graduate as thoughtful individuals – and they do. Research shows that Catholic school graduates are deeply engaged citizens with high levels of participation in volunteerism, social justice work, and the democratic process. A 2013 report conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education presents the benefits of Catholic education this way:

“Graduates wrote that Catholic education was important because it incorporated beliefs, values, morals, ethics and guiding life principles that have helped to shape who they are; gave them a sense of community in which they could participate in social activities, build relationships, and connect with members of the school community; provided an inclusive environment where they could openly and freely practice their faith; helped them to develop their faith; and provided them with insight and inspiration to guide their decisions. Catholic education, they wrote, taught them the importance of social justice, altruism, and helping others.”

A large, irregular teal brushstroke graphic that serves as a background for the text below it.

**We teach English,  
science, and how to work  
for the greater good.**





# Lessons for Life

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The values we promote, and the lessons we teach, are ones that all Ontarians embrace, regardless of their faith. And these values benefit not only Catholic students, but society as a whole.

The *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations* outline these values and inform the teaching and learning in all of our classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 12. There are seven overall, and 52 specific, expectations of learning for a Catholic school graduate - here is a snapshot:

## A Discerning Believer

- Develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity, and the common good.
- Respects the faith traditions, world religions, and the life-journeys of all people of good will.
- Understands that one's purpose or call in life comes from God and strives to discern and live out this call throughout life's journey.



## An Effective Communicator

- Listens actively and presents information and ideas clearly and honestly with sensitivity to others.
- Uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology, science, and information systems to enhance the quality of life.

## A Reflective, Creative, and Holistic Thinker

- Recognizes that there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges.
- Examines, evaluates, and applies knowledge of interdependent systems (physical, political, ethical, socio-economic, and ecological) for the development of a just and compassionate society.
- Adopts a holistic approach to life by integrating learning from various subject areas and experiences.





## A Self-Directed, Responsible, Life-long Learner

- Demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others.
- Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities, and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities.
- Responds to, manages, and constructively influences change in a discerning manner.

## A Collaborative Contributor

- Finds meaning, dignity, fulfilment, and vocation in work, which contributes to the common good.
- Respects the rights, responsibilities, and contributions of self and others.
- Achieves excellence, originality, and integrity in one's own work and supports these qualities in the work of others.

## A Caring Family Member

- Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate, and respectful manner.
- Values and nurtures the important role of the family in society.

## A Responsible Citizen

- Acts morally and legally.
- Accepts accountability for one's own actions.
- Witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful, and compassionate society.
- Respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures.
- Respects the environment and uses resources wisely.



# What we teach

What does a modern, values-based education look like in practice? Here is a peek at some of the great Lessons for Life that Catholic teachers are sharing.

## *Critical consumption*

For Anthony Perrotta's high school class, movies are part of the daily curriculum. Perrotta uses popular films as a powerful tool to further classroom dialogue on Catholic values and conscious media consumption, thereby empowering his students to be critical, creative, provoking, and active citizens. "The students make connections between the films and how they see and understand their own world: for example, how 'The Force' in *Star Wars* is similar to our faith - if we trust in it, it will guide us through our challenges."

## *Social justice*

When Cheryl Perera read about the child sex trade for a civics class assignment, she knew she had to do something to help. Her Catholic upbringing had instilled a deep well of empathy, and teachers at her Catholic high school helped turn that empathy into action. At age 17, supported by her school and parents, she went to Sri Lanka to learn more about this horrible issue. She met with Sri Lankan police and even acted as a decoy to foil a would-be predator. Upon returning to Canada, she founded One Child, an organization for youth to take action against the exploitation of children everywhere. "I wanted to empower youth like myself who felt passionate and wanted to make a difference," says Cheryl. "I felt we could take a leading role in tackling this issue. That was 15 years ago, and I'm still going strong."

**We teach reading,  
math, and how to  
change the world.**





## *Respect*

In Grades 9 and 10, Eli Marentette identified as a straight female. By the time he would leave high school, he would identify as a trans male. Eli credits his school's Gay-Straight Alliance and his Catholic teachers for providing a safe and inclusive space for him as he figured out who he was and how he wanted to express himself. "Everyone at school is facing their own struggles. What teachers can do is provide a space of acceptance and a space of love to let their students be the most authentic version of themselves they can be. I know from my own experience that is what Catholic teachers do."

## *Environmental stewardship*

Catholic teachers Sharon Deery, Kevin Sinclair, and Laura Switenky started the School of Rock program to give students a chance to learn about big issues facing society by writing original songs about them. Their composition, "Save the Earth," not only garnered them a Jack Layton Award for Youth Action in Sustainability, it also helped raise funds for a new Eco Garden at their school - a project that has helped make their school greener and is already helping to feed families in their surrounding area. "We wanted to give our students a chance to think about big issues that are affecting all of us, and environmental issues also fit in so well with our curriculum and our faith: we talk a lot about the need to be stewards of the earth, and this was a way to kind of bring together things they would talk about in all their classes - and give them a chance to sing passionately about things they care about."

## *Resilience*

Rolland Chidiac uses his love of technology to teach students that failure is just a necessary stepping stone to success. Sometimes the tools can be difficult to master, but Mr. C thinks failure is a powerful lesson for kids to learn, or, more specifically, overcome. He teaches his students that anything is possible if you just step back, think critically, and make a plan - and that failure is inevitable, but it opens the door to learning and discovering something incredible. So, if failure's going to happen anyway, Mr. C encourages his students to think big and try to accomplish something truly awesome. "It's about expecting failure, knowing it's going to happen and not letting it get in the way of your success."





Check out more of our stories  
at [lessonsforlife.ca](https://www.lessonsforlife.ca) or on  
social media at [#lessonsforlife](https://www.instagram.com/lessonsforlife).



If you know a Catholic teacher who demonstrates a commitment to making the world a better place for everyone by drawing on values such as empathy, inclusiveness, and a commitment to social justice, share their story with us at [lessonsforlife@catholicteachers.ca](mailto:lessonsforlife@catholicteachers.ca)



[catholicteachers.ca](https://www.catholicteachers.ca)