

Pondering *the* Precious Moments

This past year, before all of the Covid-19 mayhem began, some of us were sitting around the staff room at lunchtime one day. Somehow the stars had aligned and there was a bigger group of us than usual. As can sometimes happen in a Catholic school, the conversation turned to the topic of religion and God, and while I can't remember the details of what we talked about, I do remember that a sense of sacred space grew between all of us. As we talked and shared our thoughts, the presence of the Spirit seemed tangible. When the bell went at the end of the lunch hour, someone said, "That was great!" We left feeling alive and ready to enter into the rest of the day.

A lot has been written about the value of Catholic Education but, in this reflection, I am choosing to focus on what some might call a more selfish end: how working in Catholic Schools has fed me as a Teacher/ Chaplain. I grew up in Winnipeg, where my parents couldn't afford to send me to the private Catholic girls' school. It wasn't until I began teaching that I had any knowledge of the inner workings of Catholic School Districts and it was only when I came to Edmonton Catholic as a Religious Sister that I really appreciated the opportunities that we have as Catholic educators.

The fact that staffroom chitchat can quickly turn to beautiful discussions about God is just one of the ways that I often find myself spiritually nourished in my work. Every now and then, students will write or say something that makes my heart smile as I relish the wisdom of their insights. For a Religion assignment, one student wrote: "God for me is not just a person, He is everything. God is love, hope, faith. I am happy and proud to believe in God." Another printed: "God is in my heart. I would be just a human without God in my life, but now I'm a human of God with Him in me."



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A "human of God": I love that turn of phrase! And a third from a student who was born in South Sudan: "What I drew here is what God looks like to me. It is a face with no eyes, mouth or lips. Just a face full of colour: different colours." What a joy to see the Holy Spirit alive and flowing through our young people today!

And the most profound conversations about God seem to happen in the most unexpected of places. Returning from a field trip last year I sat with a group of students that I didn't know very well. A question came up about whether or not God used natural disasters to punish people. A thoughtful discussion ensued and I remember thinking how strange and wonderful it was for that discourse to happen on a school bus of all places. And yet, it's often been outside the classroom where students have turned to me and suddenly asked about my life as a Religious Sister and what it's like to live in a church (which we don't, by the way.)

In the course of our daily school routines throughout the year, there are many other moments that will suddenly bring our minds, and perhaps our hearts, back to God: watching a student pause in the chapel doorway to make the sign of the Cross, another sharing about the peace that came into her heart during a class prayer, a grandson requesting that we pray for an ill grandparent. Do I remember to stop and recognize these events as the precious gems that they are? I hope, at least sometimes, that I do.

Cardinal Bishop Luis Tagle has referred to teenagers as our unconventional prophets and evangelizers. It is time well spent to make the space every so often to sit and ponder how God is nourishing us through the students and staff that we meet in our Catholic Schools. What a gift to meet the Lord each day in buildings where God is actively welcomed. Let us pray that we will never lose sight of the varied ways God continues to bless us!