

## NIAGARA CATHOLIC ANNOUNCES 2020 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The Niagara Catholic District School Board held its Annual Organizational Meeting at the Catholic Education Centre on December 3, 2019.

Frank Fera, trustee for Niagara Falls since 2000, was re-elected as Chair of the Board by straw vote. Dino Sicoli, who has represented Catholic ratepayers in Port Colborne, Fort Erie and Wainfleet since 2010, was re-elected Vice-Chair, also on a straw vote. He previously served as Vice-Chair in 2015.

During his remarks, Chair Fera remarked on what he believes to be the Board's biggest accomplishment in 2019.

"Last year, with the assistance of the Vice-Chair and a couple of like-minded trustees, we dedicated our time in bringing the unions aboard to work cooperatively with senior staff in the interest of students – an achievement that no other Chair was able to realize in past years," he said. "As a direct result of this effort, the Director and the president of the unions are now working together to solve grievances, saving our board a great deal of money that can be utilized to better serve our students."

On Wednesday, Chair Fera further added: "Catholic education is unique, where the faith component is built-in across the curriculum, and the cooperation between home, parish and school is an integral part of Catholic education. As a Catholic school board, we are committed to continuing to promote our system, and to ensure its survival for years to come."

Vice-Chair Sicoli asked for God's blessings upon the Board of Trustees, Senior Staff and all leaders in Catholic education for the coming year.

"I ask the God of compassion to bless my fellow trustees, myself, Senior Administration, our educational leaders," he said. "May this evening and our prayerful observance of this Advent season be the beginning of a profound difference in our Niagara Catholic school system, in our homes and in our hearts. May the dawning of your Christ be a new day of justice for all who are oppressed and rejected; may His coming usher in an eternal day of peace among all."

Director of Education John Crocco congratulated Chair Fera and Vice-Chair Sicoli on their re-election, and thanked the student choir from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Elementary School for their musical contribution to the Annual Organizational Meeting.

“I am confident that Chair Fera and Vice-Chair Sicoli will continue to be strong advocates for Niagara Catholic, focused on fulfilling the Board’s Mission, Vision and Values for the students we serve in Catholic education,” he said. “I would also like to thank the Our Lady of Mount Carmel choir, led by music directors Eileen Wilson and Vanessa Dominski, for their wonderful and joyful performance of songs during this Advent season. Thank you for being a part of this special evening.”

**The complete texts of remarks by the Chair and Vice-Chair are attached for your information.**

***Niagara Catholic provides excellence in Catholic education to approximately 20,000 students throughout Niagara, from Kindergarten through graduation.***

Contact: John Crocco, Director of Education  
Issued by: Jennifer Pellegrini, Communications Officer  
Date: Thursday, December 5, 2019



Excellency Bishop Bergie, fellow trustees, senior staff, ladies and gentlemen:

I would first of all wish to express my gratitude to those trustees who supported me this evening to once again lead this Board.

Those of you who know me fully realize that if issues come before me, I will confront them directly and administer justice to promote the educational welfare of students and staff in the interest of this board. Walking away from issues does not solve problems, but rather complicates them.

Last year, with the assistance of the Vice-Chair and a couple of like-minded trustees, we dedicated our time in bringing the unions aboard to work cooperatively with senior staff in the interest of students – an achievement that no other Chair was able to realize in past years. As a direct result of this effort, the Director and the president of the unions are now working together to solve grievances, saving our board a great deal of money that can be utilized to better serve our students.

Furthermore, we have been told that staff morale has improved, and that our teachers are looking forward to the 2020 school year.

Also, through the leadership of Trustee Turner, a committee is being established to study our enrollment patterns across the system, and make recommendations to the Board. This positive outlook must continue as we embark on a journey to hire a new Director for the coming years.

I would consider this to be a task of paramount importance. Moreover, since our system is still somewhat scarred with wounds subsequent to the lockout, the new Director, apart from the many leadership skills that he/she brings to the Board, the one quality that must undeniably stand out is the ability to heal relationships between the Board and the teachers.

Accountability and transparency will continue to be priorities. To conclude, I will continue to exercise an open door policy in the interest of Niagara Catholic and assure you, once again, and admonish those sitting around this table that hypocrisy will not be tolerated and that you must be loyal to your oath of office and in the words of Saint John Paul II, and I quote, "If you want peace, work for justice."

Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and mystic, delighted in telling the story of a revered rabbi in Jerusalem. One day, a young student of the rabbi came running into the rabbi's study.

"Rabbi, Rabbi! It's true! The Messiah has finally come!" the student announced.

The rabbi calmly rose from his chair and walked over to the window. He looked carefully up and down the street. He then said to his excited friend that nothing seemed to have changed, and he quietly returned to his work.

If the rabbi in Buber's story were to look out of his window during our celebration of the Messiah's birth, he would certainly experience many different things: he would see lights, decorations and greenery, he would hear the songs of "joy to the world" and "peace on earth," he would be greeted with smiles and good wishes. But what would the rabbi see out of his window on December 26 or January 18 or in late February or on a hot day next July?

But the Messiah has come! What happened on that Palestinian night when a son was born to a carpenter and his young bride was a watershed moment in the history of humanity, the first light of a new morning, for all men and women of goodwill. But has the Messiah's coming made a difference? Has our world become a better place since the Son of God walked among us? Has anything changed?

May Christ's coming this Christmas be the beginning of a profound difference in our homes and hearts, transforming our attitudes and perspectives in the compassion and mercy of God.

I ask the God of compassion to bless my fellow trustees, myself, Senior Administration, our educational leaders. May this evening and our prayerful observance of this Advent season be the beginning of a profound difference in

our Niagara Catholic School System, in our homes and in our hearts. May the dawning of your Christ be a new day of justice for all who are oppressed and rejected; may his coming usher in an eternal day of peace among all.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve you as Vice –Chair. Thank YOU