

Kenora Catholic School System
Grade 7 through 12 Religious Educators Session – Monday, October 24
Nurturing a Religious Identity in a Diverse Community

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1. A Community of Spiritual and Religious Practices

Schools that educate and form students in the Catholic faith and spiritual life create a community that engages students (and adults) in the following Catholic Christian practices as integral to the school's identity and mission.

Community Life

1. Honoring and respecting the dignity of each person, who is created in the image and likeness of God
2. Believing in the living presence of God in each person, in the community, and in the world
3. Being a community of hospitality and welcome for all people
4. Celebrating the cultural diversity in the community and their unique faith, heritage, and traditions

Spiritual & Religious Life

5. Fostering a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
6. Finding a life of meaning and purpose in living the Christian faith as a way of life
7. Experiencing, exploring, and reading the Bible and how its message applies to life today
8. Exploring the Catholic Christian story and faith tradition, and discovering its meaning for life today
9. Worshipping God through liturgies and Masses
10. Celebrating the church year seasons
11. Learning to pray, and praying—alone and with others
12. Growing spiritually through prayer practices, spiritual disciplines, and retreat experiences
13. Learning to live with moral integrity guided by Christian values
14. Serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace
15. Discovering personal God-given gifts and learning how to use them to benefit the community and world

For children: The emphasis is on *experiencing* faith and *belonging* to a faith community. Schools provide an immersion into the Catholic faith through faith forming practices embodied in the life of the school community.

For adolescents: Building on experiencing and belonging in childhood, the emphasis moves to the young person building or constructing a spiritual/religious life by *exploring*, *discerning*, and *integrating* beliefs and practices into one's life.

2. The Challenge of Spiritual and Religious Diversity

1. Declining numbers of people (children, teens, adults) participating in religious communities
2. Increasing age (and deaths) of the Christians most engaged in a religious community
3. Rising numbers of disaffiliation among younger generations (40s and younger)
4. Rising number of children growing up in second generation religiously unaffiliated home, i.e., their parents disaffiliated and not transmitting a religious faith and practice at home

A Continuum of Belief and Practice

Inactive Nonbelievers Do not believe in God	Inactive Believers Believe in God, attend religious services less than once a month, and only slightly spiritual	Spiritual but not Religious Very or moderately spiritual persons but attend religious services less than once a month	Involved Believer Believe in God and attend religious services at least once per month	Active Believer Believe in God, attend religious services weekly, involved in a church community
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One of the consequences of the disaffiliation and involvement trend is the decline in passing on faith from generation to generation. Who is socializing the next generation into the Christian faith? Who is enriching the faith life of parents and grandparents and equipping them to transmit the Christian faith to the young? How can we develop the foundations for a life of faith in the new generation and their parents?

3. The Challenge of Faith Unbundling

(The State of Religion and Young People 2021, Springtide Research Institute)

Our data are clear: young people are not turning to religious leaders, communities, practices, or beliefs in times of uncertainty or difficulty, though the majority of young people nonetheless identify as religious or spiritual.

In orders, young people who identify as “religious” don’t necessarily participate in religion in the traditional sense. The majority are not accepting the whole “bundle” of rituals, practices, and beliefs that religious institutions offer.

Faith, or “being religious,” among the youngest generations is more “unbundled and worth a close look, especially because our data show that young people who identify as “religious” also report that in almost every facet of their lives they are flourishing more than young people who identify as “not religious.”

So What is Faith Unbundled?

When we speak of faith in the report, we mean a person’s beliefs about the self, others, nature, and the transcendent, along with the practices and rituals that express belief.

When we describe faith as unbundled, we mean that religious young people are not relying on a single religious tradition or organization to form and inform their beliefs and practices. Instead they mix together things from various traditions, religious and otherwise.

Faith Unbundled is a term that describes the way young people increasingly construct their faith by combining elements such as beliefs, identity, practices, and community from a variety of religious and non-religious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system, or tradition.

. . . . Young people with unbundled faith will partake in religion, including practices, beliefs, and communities to the degree that suits them, with no formal or permanent commitment. Springtide sees the phenomena of Faith Unbundled expressed clearly in their data:

- young people who identify with a particular religion but adopt few or none of its practices
- young people who attend religious services regularly but consider themselves agnostic, atheist, or nothing in particular
- young people who are more than twice as likely to practice the arts as a “religious or spiritual practice” than attend weekly faith groups

Young people are turning to a wide range of traditions, practices, and belief when asking and answering important questions about their faith: What do I believe? Who am I? What is my purpose in the world? What practices have value?

Hallmarks of Faith Unbundled

What does it look like to unbundle belief from a single source or system?

It looks like young people who turn to many or various sources when making meaning and discerning what to believe about right and wrong, purpose and calling, salvation and suffering, and more. It looks like **curiosity**.

What does it look like to unbundle identity from a single source of system?

It looks like young people who are unwilling to shed parts of themselves to fit into a prescribed narrative about who and how to be in the world. It looks like a commitment to **wholeness**.

What does it look like to unbundle community from a single source or system?

It looks like young people who show up where trusted personal relationships exist or new ones seem possible, young people who are willing to forgo participation in communities lacking these qualities, even if they have had long associations with these communities. It looks like **connection**.

What does it look like to unbundle practices from a single source or system?

It looks like young people who blend and adapt various rituals and behaviors to suit and make sense of the current questions they're facing. It looks like **flexibility**.

We see hallmarks of **curiosity**, **wholeness**, **connection**, and **flexibility** in our data and in our conversations with young people, practitioners, and experts.

- More than half of young people say "I agree with some, but not all, of the things my religion teachers." And "I don't feel like I need to be connected to a specific religion."
- Nearly half of young people say, "I feel like I could fit in with many religions."
- Over half of young people tell us: "I do not like to be told answers about faith and religions. I'd rather discover my own answers."
- By large majorities (over 80%) young people say they love learning new things; they believe in personal growth; and being authentic is an all-important value.
- More than half of young people don't attend religious or spiritual services because they don't feel free to be who they are at those kinds of gatherings.

4. Ideas for Responding to the Challenges

1. **Holistic:** engaging the head (inform), heart (form), and hands (transform) of students
2. **Experiential:** creating a community rich in spiritual and religious experiences for all students
3. **Practices:** teaching how to live as a Catholic, a Christian, a spiritual person; not just what to believe
4. **Personalization:** tailoring the spiritual and religious experiences to the religiosity of students; moving from one-size-fits-all faith formation to a more personalized one-size-fits one (or a small group) faith formation
5. **Experimentation:** engaging students in creating and mixing their own spiritual-religious experiences
6. **Safe Spaces:** creating safe and sacred places for faith conversations, constructing an identity, etc.
7. **Mentoring and small groups:** offering 1-1 and small group settings for faith formation
8. **Accompaniment:** journeying with young people first, then teaching young people
9. **Identity:** guidance, safe space, mentoring, and resources to develop a meaningful religious identity