



# The Sentinel



## CATHOLIC TEACHERS, LABOUR LEADERS

**Filomena Ferraro, President,**

**Executive Member of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council**

Laughter, tears, animated conversation and, of course, the shuffling of papers - the sounds of people gathering for a meeting of the Toronto and York Region labour council. Hundreds of people representing many unions, occupations, religions, and ethnicities gather once a month to confirm their commitment to the House of Labour. I gather

alongside them with other members at York OECA. We gather to share and listen to stories of success, as well as stories of struggles faced in the workplace. We are a community of people who often refer to ourselves as a “labour family”. A fitting name since we not only address labour issues, but often take on broader social justice issues that affect all Canadians.

Our chants are not just words: “the best way to make it fair is to make it union,” “organize, educate, and resist”, “no justice, no peace”, “the best anti-poverty program is a union”, they are firmly held beliefs.

Workers share inspirational stories of their struggles to achieve and maintain their rights in the workplace. As teachers it can be

difficult to relate to issues of pay equity, employer intimidation, the challenges of organizing a union, or the need to support workers who face termination while on maternity leave. Unfortunately these are real problems for many workers in many workplaces and though they don't affect us directly, they may one day affect someone we know, our children or grandchildren, or the students we teach. Labour council meetings provide a forum for workers to speak up. As Catholic teachers and unionists we should take an active role in the fight for social justice. Participation in labour council meetings and related events provide us an opportunity to get involved.

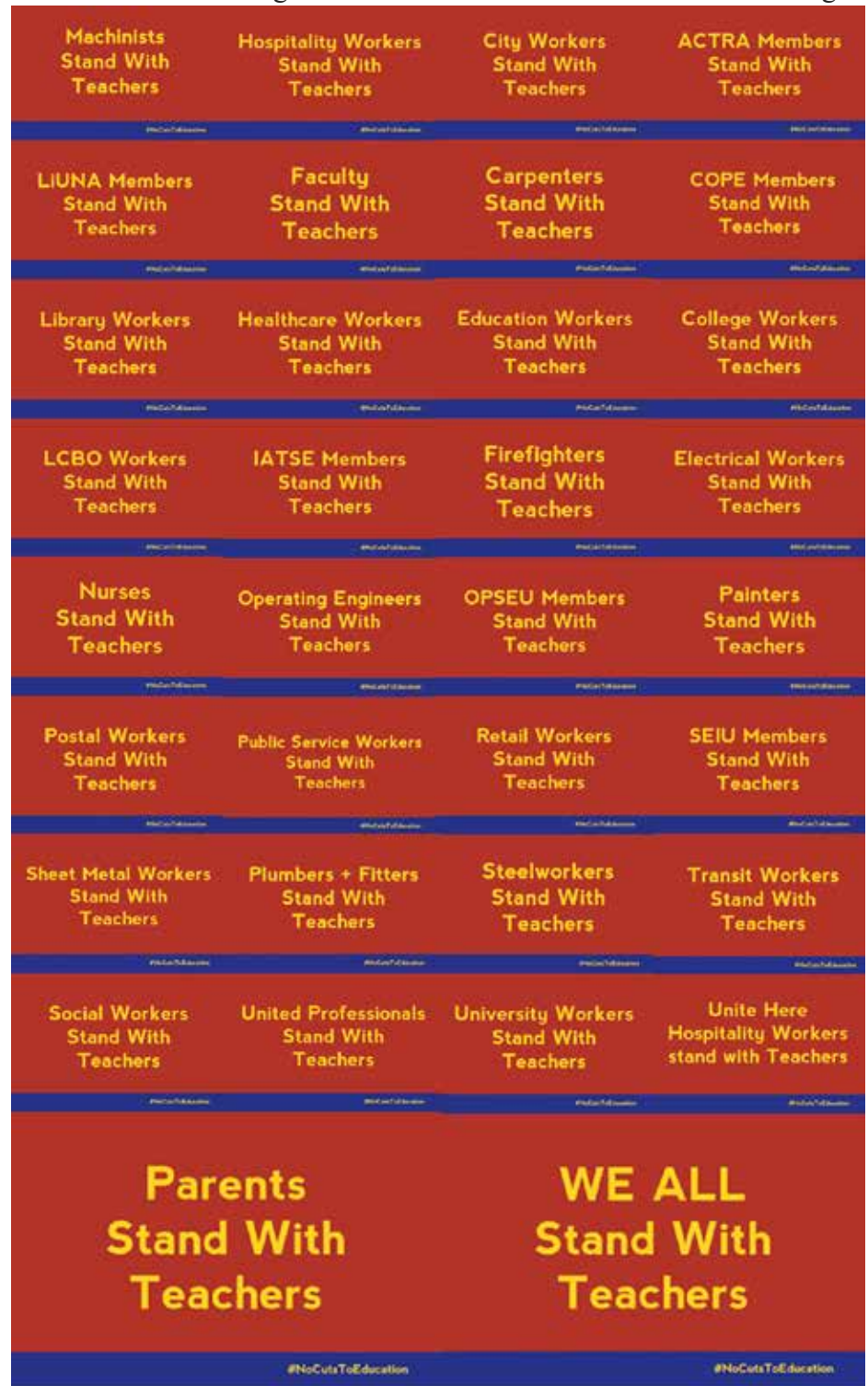
Hearing about the success of recent organization drives, such as stopping the 'Uploading of Public Transit' or the recent mobilization of Parent Coalitions with Labour, one can't help but feel the excitement of those gathered, and for all unionists and all workers. Many in the room applaud, some hug one another, while others shed tears. It is clear that everyone is invested emotionally, and all share in the successes. You leave each meeting motivated to continue the fight for yourself, your union, and for the next generation of workers. At the moment we are in the fight of our lives.

Recently, Labour Council Meetings have provided the strength we need, as teachers, in the fight to stop the Ford government and their cuts to

education. We have received overwhelming support from a vast majority of unions. Labour council meetings provide us with a safe space to talk about the issues in education and the challenges teachers are facing in classrooms.

Labour council meetings also

provide a great opportunity for Catholic teachers to share with our sisters and brothers OECTA's rich history and modern realities. For example, we can talk about the fact that our high schools welcome students of all religions. We can also highlight Catholic teachers' work toward achieving





social justice. We might prepare presentations on climate change, in connection with Pope Francis's encyclical, or discuss the ways local units address poverty and inequality in their respective communities. We can also inform our union sisters and brothers about how poorly teachers are treated in other parts of the world. As a labour council we can work together to develop action plans to address these matters.

By acknowledging that we share common goals and values, we come to realize that there is more that unites labour groups than divides them. The labour council should be seen by all as the voice of the working people and the voice of Catholic teachers must be heard. Our local labour council meetings should be regularly scheduled events. Members of our Political Action and Collective Bargaining committees are encouraged to attend. These gatherings can provide opportunities for leadership development, particularly for young workers and beginning teachers.

Even if you are not formally involved in our local labour council, you can still participate in labour-sponsored events. For example, many Catholic teachers recently joined with workers from across the province in Climate Strikes. In your local community you might make an effort to support striking or locked-out workers, to march in the Labour Day parade, or to participate in



food drives or other charitable activities. As we engage in job action we are witnessing firsthand how other labour groups are supporting teachers and education workers. Working at the grassroots level improves solidarity, and keeps us grounded in the struggles of the majority of people. An injustice to one is in fact an injustice to all. Deepening and personalizing our understanding of social justice issues helps us to develop empathy for all. When relationships are forged at local and personal levels, we become better equipped to challenge the injustices found in every institution. Involvement with labour councils allows us, as Catholic teachers, to build stronger bonds with various local unions in York Region.



We need to continue to work with our local labour council and to encourage your fellow teachers to do the same. Let your community know what Catholic teachers are all about!



## To Each Their Own

### Daniel Astorino, Teacher @ Jean Vanier

I was inspired to write after reading an article about the current affairs in education (I know, my bad!). The article went something like this:

Public: “Teachers are useless”

Teacher: “No we’re not”

Public: “Yes you are! You don’t work!”

Teacher: “Yes we do, we work hard and deal with a number of serious issues everyday”

Public: “Stop complaining! If you hate your job, quit!”

Teacher: “Who said I hate my job? I love my job! You said, “we’re useless and don’t work”.

And so the conversation goes . . .

I’m an engineer (and a teacher) who previously worked in the private sector. Teaching is my second career. Some say “Those that can’t do, teach”, but that’s not how I ended up in teaching. I worked my way up to project manager, was promoted 4 times in the first 2 years of my career and was approaching a 5th promotion in 4 years. I realized however that there were many people who could do my job and I wanted to do something more fulfilling. I believe our sole purpose is to serve others and so, fully aware of the pay cut I would be taking, I chose to become a Catholic teacher. I feel a sense of purpose when showing others that anything is achievable with the right work ethic and mindset. I also believe in the old adage “Choose a job you love, and you won’t work a day in your life.”

Summers off . . . a great perk of teaching. I love to golf, except I don’t golf nearly as much as I did when I worked in the private sector. Summers aren’t off as many assume them to be. Ask my friends who often say, “but you’re a teacher, you’re off, stop working and come golfing!”. My summers are busy. In July I teach a grade 11/12 physics course and in August I typically take a week off before

getting back to work prepping for September.

In addition to teaching I have also coached golf, badminton, volleyball, and swimming and run an ‘app development’ club after and/or before classes.

Here’s an interesting story. On July 27, 2018, the last day of summer school, I filled my car’s gas tank. On August 27th, one month later, I drove to the airport, on that same tank of gas, to pick up my in-laws. I had spent the entire month preparing for 2 new courses I would be teaching in September.

March break . . . also a great perk. I’ve learned from colleagues that giving a test immediately following March break isn’t best practice since most 14-17 year-olds don’t spend the break studying. Therefore we give tests right before the March break which makes me grateful for a week off to mark the 90 tests I received just prior to the break, to relax and to prepare for the last quarter of the school year.

I’ve worked in both the private and public sectors. I know about the hours required for each and my friends and family can attest that my hours of work have not changed. My sense of purpose, however, has changed. Some say “A bad day on the golf course beats a good day in the office”. For me a bad day in the classroom beats a good day in business. Instead of working to make a company money, I’m working to help 1, 2, up to 90 students reach their potential. The sense of purpose I feel teaching is incomparable. I believe I’m working towards a greater good..

I love my job. I love the constant need to upgrade my knowledge and skills. I teach a programming course and things in that field are developing increasingly quickly. It requires me to keep up to date with the students. I am always considering the new-

est advancements and figuring out how I can incorporate them into my science or math lessons. Or how I can get the students to see connections between the real world and the theory in the textbook. Contemplating how I can get the students to want to do this, and more than this?

I don’t understand why people engage in teacher bashing. I’m not asking to be thanked or appreciated for what I do, though I thank the store clerk who answers my questions and the Rogers employee who helped save me some money (it happens!). I know that not everyone gets thanked for the job they do.. I’m not asking to be thanked. I’m simply asking that people look at teachers as they look at people in other jobs or professions. It is my hope that they will see that teachers care about the children they teach and want what’s best for them. Maybe we can be respected for that. Or perhaps you will recognize and agree that we share a common interest, the betterment of your child.

Lastly, to those who say “teachers have a great gig!” I want to advise that you too, can be a teacher, it’s not an exclusive club. We, as a profession, promote anti-discrimination and support diversity. With the required education, a Bachelor of Arts, two additional years at teacher’s college, a willingness to spend additional monies to upgrade, (required to reach the top of the pay grid), and to put in 8-10 years before attaining a permanent position, you too can teach and are welcome to join this wonderful profession.

Just a teacher doing my job and my part to build a better future.



## PENSION TOP UP REGARDING STRIKE

**Your pension should be unaffected by a legal strike or lockout.** Firstly, your pension credit is not affected during a legal strike or lockout because your employer still reports your FTE status for pension credit. However, your employer reports a loss of salary for the time you are on a legal strike or lockout. The loss of salary only affects your future pension if it occurs within your best five years. **If this is one of your best five years of salary, OECTA will top up the pension contributions on your behalf so that your best five years of salary are unaffected from a pension perspective.**

**You do not need to do anything about this until you are applying for your pension.** When you decide to retire, the pension application process through the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP), will ask you to check a box indicating that one of your best five years was affected by a legal strike. OTPP will review your salary and they will calculate the shortfall in pension contributions related to the strike days. OTPP will send an invoice statement to OECTA who will make the top up in pension contributions on behalf of the member.

NOTE: Strikebreakers are not eligible to receive OECTA's repayment of pension contributions to the OTPP for teachers in their best five years.



# **Strike Subsidies and the Dangerous Path to a Voucher System**

**By: Michael Oyston, YCT Councillor**

The following article addresses the government’s offer to subsidize day-care costs for those parents affected by the recent job action. Everyone who qualifies is eligible for, and has a right to, these funds. If, however, you are still considering making an application for these funds please be aware of and consider the following.

First, in accessing these funds you are giving the government access to personal information, which they claim will be used to aid in the administration of the program. This information will also be shared with various Ministries in order to determine eligibility. As stated “your information will be collected and shared with the Ministries of Government and Consumer Services, Finance and Other Government Ministries.” The “Other” Ministries are not specified and there is little information available about what other Ministries would have access to your data. Additionally, at the time of writing, it was unclear

whether or not these monies would be taxable. Keep an eye out for more information as tax season approaches. Secondly, regardless of your reasons for accepting the subsidy the government will interpret your request as support for their current positions on bargaining. The government is touting the overwhelming number of parents who registered for this subsidy on day one. The spin however, is that these numbers show overwhelming support for the current stance of the government. Finally, please keep in mind that by accepting the subsidy you are showing your support to the government - that you are in fact in favour of moving our publicly funded education system toward a school choice or voucher system.

Recently the Minister of Education posed for a photo op at a STEM Play Centre in Barrie where he lauded the owner for offering a Strike Camp. In essence the Minister was advocating using public monies to support or

fund private business. By promoting the use of the subsidy in this manner the government is testing the waters for a voucher system. In a voucher system the government provides funding to cover the costs of tuition, or in some situations the costs associated with homeschooling. A quick glance at private schools in York Region will show tuition and associated fees ranging from \$10,000 to upwards of \$48,000/year. The caveat with voucher systems is that the government will not provide all families with tuition costs to cover the school of their choice. Those who can afford \$48,000/year may get \$1,500. - 2,000. (of public money) to apply toward tuition fees. This still puts private schooling out of reach for most,

provides a tuition break to the wealthy and diverts money away from the public system. The real danger of voucher schools however comes from the opening of new ‘schools’ which will pop up in strip







malls, office buildings and industrial parks with tuition fees of \$1,500 - 2,000. Very appealing to those who think they can get a private school education at a bargain price. However, those ‘businesses’ quickly realize that running a school is expensive, (from consumables to salaries, paying teachers slightly above minimum wage) and tend to close up shop. There are numerous cases in the United States of students being left stranded half way through the school year as the business runs out of funds, or is no longer profitable. Again, these are public funds going towards private business with no guarantee that they will remain open if the owner is not making money. Many of these schools are not bound by the same regulations regarding the curriculum being delivered or who is qualified to teach courses as are

publicly funded schools. Remember Fordnation is all about cutting red tape, so there will be even less oversight of these facilities than there is currently. Another perspective, voucher schools, because they are private business, are not bound to accept students with special needs, or even those with an IEP. Offering special support and programming through the use of EA’s, DECE’s or a modified curriculum is an expense which cuts into the bottom line. Often times students who require, or who may require extra supports for their learning, are turned away, sent back to the public system. A system which lacks the funds to support these students as the money supports the voucher system. The bottom line - these schools are a business. Profits will always come before student success.

This does not mean that all private schools are nefarious or on the brink of closure. It does, however, mean that if the government senses that there is support for voucher schools they will move toward offering school choice which diverts funding from public schools, will proliferate substandard education and will see a further explosion of credit mills. We need to be cognizant of the message the government is getting as a result of the overwhelming response to the offer of a subsidy resulting from job action. Consider this a caution, what does receiving that \$25.00 daycare subsidy mean to the future of publicly funded education in the province of Ontario?









# The Right to a Safe Workplace

## By: Reg Shepherd, YCT Councillor

It is **not your job** to be:

- Punched
- Kicked
- Spit at, or
- Threatened

It is your **right** to RETURN HOME FROM WORK, THE SAME WAY YOU LEFT FOR WORK.

Having said that however, while facing cuts to staffing, special education and overall funding, incidences of violence in the workplace are increasing. There is, however, very little discussion in the media of the violence and aggression teachers face on a daily basis.

Teachers work in classrooms, from Jk through Gr. 12, where the behaviour of one (or more) student(s), the aggressor, is so extreme, that teachers are forced to evacuate the other students, or to intervene physically in order to ensure the safety of all students, and sometimes of other staff members as well. Sadly, these occurrences are becoming increasingly more common. Violence is spreading across our system and the number of incidences continues to rise. In September alone, there were 91 reports of *Targeted Physical Aggression* by students toward staff. These stats do not include non-physical altercations or student-to-student violence.

AS A WORKER, YOU HAVE RIGHTS! You have:

- The Right to Know
- The Right to Participate
- The Right to Refuse Unsafe Work

The “RIGHT TO KNOW”, requires the employer to provide all relevant information when working with students who pose a risk. The employer (the Board) *must* also provide detailed information if the student you are working with has a history of violence or aggression. There can be limits on disclosure depending on the workers’ potential of being in contact with a student with a history, but those in direct contact must receive all relevant information.

What about CONFIDENTIALITY?

*The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) supercedes confidentiality when a teacher (worker) may be placed in danger [S.2.(2) Despite anything in any general or special act, the provisions of this act and the regulations prevail.]*

- *If the Employer informs you they cannot provide you with detailed information that will assist in your safety, they may be in contravention of the OHSA*

A worker has the RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE in keeping the workplace safe, by taking part in activities related to their health and safety. Workers also have some responsibilities. They must report all hazards to the employer, without fear of reprisal, reprimand or punishment. As a worker, you must report all forms of violence. The employer must also ensure that workers help in deciding how to address the hazards.

A worker has the RIGHT TO REFUSE WORK. If you ever find yourself in a scenario you deem unsafe or that puts you at risk of injury, you have the right to refuse work. There is a stipulation for teachers however, defined under regulation 857, which prohibits you from refusing work when a student or students in your care is, or are, in imminent danger. Once the imminent danger has passed, you are then entitled to refuse work.

A teacher refuses work by reporting to their Administrator that they are doing so and why. The teacher is to be assigned alternate work, he or she is not to be sent home. A Certified Worker Member is called to assist the teacher, who will meet with the Employer to help to resolve the issue. If the matter is resolved, the teacher returns to work. If a resolution cannot be found, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) is called to investigate. The MOL will issue a resolution to the work refusal, though this may take some time.

Another teacher will be assigned to the role which has been refused for the duration of the investigation. That member MUST be informed of the work refusal and provided with the reason for the work refusal, in the presence of a Certified Worker Member. The member has the right to refuse the role.

Workers always have the right to seek clarification from their Association and/or Certified Health and Safety Worker and cannot be impeded and/or disciplined for seeking such guidance. You may also call the MOL for council, or to report a Health and Safety Concern. If you choose to report a concern, the MOL will attend your workplace and perform an investigation. The MOL information Number is 1-877-202-0008





Tips to give you peace of mind during your March break vacation

A March break family vacation is a great time to build lasting memories, strengthen family bonds and escape from normal day-to-day life. When you're getting ready for a vacation, make sure you're also taking steps to give yourself peace of mind while you're away by protecting your home and car. Follow the tips below to ensure you have the important things covered before you hit the road!

For more information, visit [www.otipinsurance.com/article63](http://www.otipinsurance.com/article63).



# ANNOUNCEMENTS



## BIRTHS AND ADOPTIONS

**Angela Baroni**, teacher at St. John Bosco, on the birth of her son Alessandro.

**Jessica Cisternino**, teacher at St. Robert CHS on the birth of her daughter Milena.

**Rosanna D'Alessandro**, teacher at St. Mary, Nobleton, on the birth of her son Gabriel.

**Arthur D'Sylva**, teacher at Holy Cross CHS, on the birth of his son Nicholas.

**Enza Mazzone**, teacher at Notre Dame, on the birth of her son Christian.

**Ana Moccia**, teacher at Our Lady of Fatima, on the birth of her twins, Matteo and Daniela.

**Dan Rovere**, teacher at St. Robert CHS, on the birth of his daughter Carolina.

**Gabriela Serbu**, teacher at Holy Cross CHS, on the birth of her son Alexander.

**Colleen Slattery**, teacher at St. Jerome, on the birth of her daughter Juliana.



## CONDOLENCES & SYMPATHY

**Kristina Addorisio**, teacher at St. Brendan on the death of her grandmother.

**Carla Anibaldi**, teacher at St. Veronica on the death of her father.

**Peter Binelli**, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS on the death of his mother.

**Nadia Bonin**, teacher at St. Clement on the death of her father.

**Lori Butrico**, teacher at St. Margaret Mary on the death of her mother.

**Rosanna D'Annunzio**, teacher at St. Joseph the Worker on the death of her grandmother.

**Anna Da Silva**, teacher at St. Cecilia on the death of her mother.

**Linda Deluca**, teacher at St. Padre Pio on the death of her mother.

**Natasha Del Pippo**, teacher at Good Shepherd on the death of her grandfather.

**Steven Dionne**, teacher at St. Patrick-Markham on the death of his father.

**Maria Di Re**, teacher at Canadian Martyrs on the death of her mother.

**Stacy Dovgala**, teacher at Our Lady of the Lake CCS on the death of her mother.

**Ida Facciolo**, teacher at St. Clement on the death of her father-in-law.

**Maria Ferrulli**, OT on the death of her cousin.

**Nora FitzGerald**, teacher at St. Matthew/St. John XXIII on the death of her father.

**Stephen Hull**, teacher at Corpus Christi on the death of her father-in-law.

**Jennifer Laing**, teacher at St. Brigid on the death of her grandfather.

**Bruna Ireland**, teacher at St. Francis Xavier on the death of her father-in-law.

**Claudia LaValle**, teacher at St. Brigid on the death of her father.

**Richard Leo**, teacher at St. Stephen on the death of his mother-in-law.

**Jessica McGinnes**, teacher at St. Brendan on the death of her father-in-law.

**Samantha Moscatiello**, teacher at St. John Chrysostom on the death of her grandfather.

**Erica Norris**, Special Ed Program Consultant at the CEC on the death of her father-in-law.

**Michael Oyston**, teacher at St. Augustine CHS and Councillor on the York Unit Executive on the death of his father-in-law.

**Josephine Palmeri**, teacher at St. John Paul II on the death of her father.

**Lisa Parkes**, teacher at St. Brendan on the death of her mother-in-law.

**Rosanna Manzerra**, teacher at Cardinal Carter CHS on the death of her father.

**Liliana Rodrigues**, teacher at St. Gabriel on the death of her father-in-law.

**Diana Toste**, teacher at St. Mary on the death of her grandmother.

**Sandra Valeri**, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS on the death of her mother-in-law.

**Lisa Varricchio**, teacher at St. Gabriel on the death of her father-in-law.

