

Students at Catholic schools find supportive community and a way to live out the faith



Tyra Reed

As Tyra Reed prepares to graduate from high school this year, she says she can't imagine life without the friends, mentors and memories that she's gained in Catholic schools.

The Grade 12 student at Mother Margaret Mary school in Edmonton said Catholic education has given her a community and physical space to live out her faith.

"I think it would completely change the person I am," said Reed.

"It's a tight-knit community, and you have a lot of support and people that are there for you. A nice aspect of going to a Catholic school is having the liturgies and accessibility to the chapel."



Shayne Billey

Shayne Billey, a parent and a teacher at Mother Margaret Mary, said he chose Catholic education for his three children because he wants his kids to stay grounded in their faith.

“Being able to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – being able to have those moments with our children where we put the ashes on their forehead, they’re very important moments for us and hopefully for the children as well too.”

Thousands of Catholics demonstrated their support for faith-based education on May 10, World Catholic Education Day, capping off a week of celebrations. Students and teachers wore blue – the colour of the Virgin Mary – and shared stories on social media about how Catholic education changed their lives.

“It’s more than a religion class. It’s more than just saying prayers or having a cross in the room,” said Adriana LaGrange, president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association.

“It’s really a culture of faith, where faith permeates throughout the whole of the school day and all of the curriculum. It’s just a coming together of witnessing the life of Christ (that is) lived in our community.”



Kennedy Tauber

Students at Mother Margaret Mary, for instance, participate in the Change-Makers project, a community service program integrating faith and the social justice teachings of the Church.

Tyra Reed participated in a community clean-up. For Kennedy Tauber, a Grade 11 student at Mother Margaret Mary, it was a food drive.



Heather Kaup

“The idea was that if you understand yourself and what gifts God poured into you, then (you can) understand how you can use those to serve others,” said Heather Kaup, principal of Mother Margaret Mary school. “You don’t get that element in a public school.”

Nevertheless, there are challenges, LaGrange said. Enrolment has grown by 3,000 students to roughly 178,000 last year in more than 440 schools in Alberta.

“It is growing quickly, and approximately one-third of all students in the province attend a Catholic school,” LaGrange said. “So to find the space to accommodate that is a huge challenge.”

Critics of Catholic education continue to call for single publicly funded school system in Alberta, arguing that a dual system is too costly for taxpayers. But LaGrange said that Catholic education is an investment.

And students themselves agree, regardless of where they are on their faith journey.

“There’s so many pressures and stresses in school, and it’s nice to know that the teachers have your back, especially in a faithful, Christian way. It’s just reassuring.”

“Even if they don’t choose to believe in God, they’re still aware that ‘Oh, there’s something else, there’s something more,” said Kennedy Tauber.