

Volume 1  
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# The Catholic Teachers Guild of Toronto Newsletter

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"At Bethlehem He was wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a manger; on Calvary He was wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a tomb" Caryl Houselander (Wood of the Cradle; Wood of the Cross)

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## News Items



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## Dr. Janine Langan and Mrs. Sue Almonte

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As some of you may know already, we mourn the passing of two incredible Catholic educators: Dr. Janine Langan and Mrs. Sue Almonte. They were called to the Lord on the Vigil of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 2021, Mrs. Langan dying very unexpectedly and Mrs. Almonte dying after a long battle with cancer. Both were awarded the Jean Baptiste de La Salle Award for their tremendous witness and service and excellence in teaching, Mrs. Langan in 2016, and Mrs. Almonte in 2020. We pray for the repose of their souls and thank God for the gift of their lives.

Mrs. Langan's obituary: <https://stmikes.utoronto.ca/news/st-michaels-remembers-dr-janine-langan>

Mrs. Almonte's obituary: <https://www.echovita.com/ca/obituaries/on/toronto/susan-almonte-13835552>

### Book Club

Steve Sedran continues to lead the book club this year as they study Dante's The Divine Comedy. On average, they have an attendance of 7 to 10 people at the Newman Center in Toronto. The book club continues in 2022.

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### Novena to St. John Bosco (*By Madeline Dawson*)

Sat Jan 22nd- Mon Jan 31st  
7:45 - 8:05 pm nightly on Zoom

Each night we will briefly gather to learn about one of the many fascinating aspects of St. John Bosco's life (i.e. his acrobatic feats, his miracles, the assassination attempts he escaped, the mysterious dog who followed and protected him, his prophetic dreams, and more!) and to say a prayer to him.

Participants need not attend every night, but rather are encouraged to join whenever available.

Novenas, an ancient treasure of devotion, are being rediscovered by many Catholics, and are rapidly growing in popularity. "*What is a novena?*" you may ask. Simply, a novena (from the Latin "novem" for "nine") is a prayer said for nine consecutive days to implore special graces. The first novena, and the one upon which all others are based, is that of Our Lady and the Apostles in their nine days of fervent prayer awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promised "Advocate", who came upon them in the Cenacle on the tenth day.

Teaching perseverance in prayer and dependence on our friends in heaven, novenas are undoubtedly needed in these peculiar and confusing times, in which the young people entrusted to our care are especially challenged in their search for *true* joy.

St. John Bosco saw the unique sufferings of the youth in his own time, and with his indefatigable charity, his sense of fun, his immense piety, and his fear of the Lord, swept the lost youth into a great band of scholars and young professionals with hearts on fire for God. He helped secure apprenticeships for many of his spiritual sons, and ensured they were treated fairly by their employers, who at this time, were wont to beat their workers and neglect the terms of their agreements.

Our **Novena to St. John Bosco**, taking place from Jan 22nd to Jan 31st, is **especially dedicated to the well-being and the sanctification of our youth**. We ask St. John Bosco to give us his tireless love, his propensity to see others' full potential, in spite of their current states, and his constant recognition that so little as of yet has been done to repay God for His love for us.

To register to participate in this novena, email Madeline Dawson at [madeline.dawson95@gmail.com](mailto:madeline.dawson95@gmail.com)

### **Teacher Formation Series**

The dates for this series are Jan 19, Feb 16, Mar 30, Apr 20, May 18. The meetings will take place on Zoom. There are 15-20 people registered so far. You can expect an invitation by email very soon.

### **Lenten Retreat**

On March 26, 2022, we will have our Lenten Retreat at St. Paul's Basilica. Our speakers will be Father Don Sanvido (Hamilton Diocese) and our Chaplain Deacon Doug McManaman. If you would like to listen to an interview with Father Don, just copy and paste this link and enjoy it: <https://dmcmanaman.com/2019/07/26/live-studio-interview-with-father-don-sanvido-part-ii/>. Lunch will be provided.

### **A Few Thoughts for the Feast of the Holy Family** **Dcn D. McManaman** (*Chaplain of the CTG, Toronto*)

This year our pastor in Aurora assigned the pastoral team to visit the schools within the parish boundaries, and we've each been assigned a number of classes to visit, to read a scripture with the kids, and discuss it, and we do that once a month. This year we are reading and discussing one miracle a month. One thing that always impresses me about the students I visit in grade 4, 5, and 6, is the amount of faith they have, as well as the amount of understanding of what it is we have just read. That testifies to two things: the light of faith, which is a light that is rooted in the gift of faith which they received in Baptism, and it also testifies to the good work of the parents--not to mention some teachers.

In the gospel today, the teachers of the Law were astounded at Jesus' understanding and his wisdom. Where did Jesus get his understanding? Well, there are two sources. First, there's no doubt from this gospel that he had an understanding of his divine Sonship. He said to Mary and Joseph: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's

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house?” Mary didn’t quite understand what he meant, but he did. He had an understanding of his divine sonship, which is why he refers to God as ‘my Father’, which was unique in the history of Israel.

But Jesus is fully human as well. When and in what way did the divine mind of the Son intersect with Jesus’ human mind? We don’t really know the answer to that question. But if he was like us in all things but sin, then it follows that he must have experienced human constraints and limits and to some degree needed the guidance of others, like his parents. And so, the other source of his understanding and wisdom would have come from Mary and Joseph. The primary duty of the father of a Jewish household was to pass down the teachings of the Torah to his children. Jesus also got his learning from his mother, because the mother of a Jewish household has a significant role as teacher, as it says in Proverbs, chapters 1 and 6.

And what were they doing in Jerusalem? Like a faithful Jewish family, they were there for the feast of Passover, and the gospel tells us that they would go every year. The reason that Jews celebrate feasts is that history exists in the memories of people, and memories fade, unless we work to keep them alive. That is why the Lord commanded Israel to celebrate feasts throughout the year, feasts that commemorate God’s action in history. If they remember God’s action in history, they will remain grateful. If they forget, they will lose gratitude and become an irreligious people. All the requirements of the Torah, the rituals in all their detail, exist for the sake of reminding, keeping history alive in the memories of the Jews. The parents’ primary duty was to pass down the teachings of the Torah to their children. Everything else was secondary. Mary and Joseph fulfilled what was their primary duty, and the reaction of the teachers of the law clearly shows this.

And, of course, Catholicism comes out of Judaism, and we too have a liturgical year dotted with feasts and solemnities, and it is all geared to remembering and re-living, and entering into the mystery of Christ’s life. It is rich in content. One of the things that Father Arthur Lee began doing for weekday Mass was to provide a brief homily on the life of the particular saint whose feast it is that day. And it is always very inspiring to hear, and others have said that as well. I think the reason it is inspiring is that the saints are our older siblings, and when we hear about them, we are learning about our own family, our own family history. We get a better sense that we really do belong to a larger family that extends all the way back centuries, and we belong to a historical tradition that is much larger than our current situation in the world.

I remember the weekend I visited Father Don Sanvido (who will be leading our retreat in March), which I would do quite often, to give him a break from preaching. One Saturday morning I woke up early, about 5 a.m, and so I went to his living room and prayed the breviary, and when I was done, I looked up and across the living room at the far end was a bookshelf, and I noticed the four-volume set of Butler’s Lives of the saints. So I got up and walked over to it, closed my eyes, reached out and grabbed a volume, opened it up and put my finger on the page, and where my finger landed, I would read the life of that saint. I’d randomly picked a 3rd century saint that I’d never heard of before, and just read the page and a half of her life. And I remember after reading

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it feeling so inspired by it, built up as if I had just consumed something nutritious. I put the volume back and did it again, closed my eyes and randomly selected a volume and a page, and I got some 5th century unknown saint, and his life was so different than the previous, such a different personality, but I remember again feeling so exhilarated by his life.

If it is true that we only really know ourselves in community, especially and above all in the first and smaller community of the family, then we really do come to a deeper understanding of ourselves when we come to know the lives of the saints, because we come to a deeper understanding of our own larger family, our own siblings.

And this brings me to a final point. The students I had over the years were always interested in the diabolical, and they had all sorts of questions about exorcism, possession, the demonic, and in many ways that's a problem. They bought into the lie of Hollywood, a lie that many in this world have bought into. The lie is that evil is interesting, but goodness is boring. Newspapers function on that lie, which is why they won't publish stories about a school raising 50 thousand food items for the poor at Christmas, for example, but they will publish a story about a stabbing that took place in a school. The truth is the complete reverse: goodness is profoundly interesting and inspiring, but evil is ultimately boring. Goodness has depth, but evil is nauseatingly empty. But many people typically think otherwise. There's an exorcist in the US who sometimes gives talks at universities. The lecture halls are always jam packed, not even standing room. Why? Students think evil is intriguing. If someone was there giving a talk on Scripture or the lives of some saints, the lecture hall would be virtually empty. But there's no depth to evil; and in the end, it disappoints. Only goodness has the capacity to inspire, and when we are in touch with that historical tradition of ours that goes all the way back to the Old Testament, through the New Testament and through the centuries with the lives of the saints, we are enriched, and when we pass that on to our children, they too are enriched.

Young people love the faith, they love it when the Scriptures are explained to them without draining them of their mystery, and they love the stories of the lives of great saints. And that's the great dignity of parenting. It's the most important work. I used to ask students what's the most important work, and they'd give me all sorts of answers from politician, medical doctor, police officer, court judge, but of course the answer is parenting. That they don't know that is revealing. But parenting is the most important work. And if you think about it, everything we do in the Church, from daily Mass to baptism prep, confirmation prep, marriage prep, baptisms, Confirmation, first communion, and marriages, funerals, etc., it is all ordered to the service of the family.

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## President's Message

Dear Membership,

We're in the darkest and, for many, gloomiest part of the year. Cold snowy days filled with minimal sunlight mark the long weeks of January. It strikes me as somewhat profound though, a few weeks ago we had all this gaiety and warm sentiments of Christmas, and now, reality is back. And yet, we shouldn't forget that since the final week of Advent, something has been happening. The days are getting longer. Perhaps the few minutes of extra sunlight we're now getting is probably unnoticeable. Nonetheless, the northern hemisphere is seeing more and more light, bit by bit. Within a few more weeks, it'll be recognizable, and with in a few more weeks after that, the spring equinox will be among us.

In some ways, nature serves as a metaphor for Christ's own salvific work. We have certain exuberant moments of great importance in the liturgical calendar (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), but in between, it can feel that between daily chores, slogging it to work, marking, family responsibilities, it's all a bit lackluster. However, the celebratory moments (like the one we had a few weeks ago) point to a reality that is happening not once or twice a year, but daily. Daily, our souls receive grace, often unbeknownst to us. Like the growing light in the world, so too, we are transformed bit by bit in small ways, often through the simple and mundane. We must not forget that as we lumber through the dead of winter, the world and our own very selves are transforming, becoming more luminous. We are becoming more perfect versions of ourselves, ordered to God's perfect reality. Transformation is not something that occurs on a few exciting days of the year, but rather, it is an ongoing process within us. We may not be aware of it most of the time, but deeply profound and wonderful things are happening in each of us, as they are in all of God's creation.

In Christ,  
*Andrew Hume*

President  
Catholic Teachers Guild of Toronto