

## October 2014 – Staff Meeting Faith Formation

### Slide 1

#### **Reader:**

Thanksgiving weekend took on special significance this year for Canadian Catholics as Pope Francis celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving for the two newest Canadian saints, St. Marie of the Incarnation and St. Françoise de Laval. Both lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and both are highly regarded as missionaries to New France.

### Slide 2

#### **Reader:**

As a young child growing up in France, Marie saw Jesus in a dream where he asked “do you want to be mine?” Marie’s “yes” was to make of her life a series of “generous impulses.” It was said that Marie “was a little girl who was drawn towards divine realities.”

Married young and widowed early with a young child, Marie showed great talent as a businesswoman while always maintaining a positive, generous spirit in all that she did. In 1633 she took vows as an Ursuline nun, and once again said “yes”, yes to God’s call to go to New France as a missionary.

Today much has been criticized in the missionary efforts of the time, and yet it is clear from a number of sources including Saint Marie’s prolific correspondence, that she held a genuine love for the people she served, and made every attempt to connect spiritually within their culture. The children of French settlers were educated alongside the aboriginal students, and Marie quickly realized that an outdoor classroom with much engagement with nature was the best learning environment.

Saint Marie was over 40 when she began to study aboriginal languages, and became so proficient that she wrote French-Algonkin, Algonkin-French and Iroquois dictionaries and catechism.

Ultimately Saint Marie of the Incarnation began a long tradition in North America of education for girls and young women of all faiths and languages.

### Slide 3

#### **Reader:**

Also from France, Saint Françoise de Laval was educated by the Jesuits, and was ordained in 1647. While in France he enjoyed a comfortable life of great privilege and a substantial birthright, however he felt drawn to be a missionary and left all behind to say “yes”, yes to the call to missionary life in Canada.

Saint Françoise was the first Bishop of New France, and was admired for his pastoral presence with aboriginal peoples. He was known for his advocacy efforts for Native peoples in protecting them from exploitation by merchants and governors over the sale of alcohol.

Saint Françoise was a very simple man. “This worthy, virtuous prelate wore old, patched garments. For twenty years he owned only two winter cassocks. At his death one of them was still good; the other, threadbare and patched, attested to his wonderful spirit of poverty. Hard on himself, this admirable man of God was prodigal to excess towards Christ’s poor. Every year he never failed to give the needy 1,500 to 2,000 pounds.” You can imagine the worth of this in the mid 1600s.

Laval gave one piece of advice to the missionaries in 1668, which could also be applied to our work in education: “Too often a sharp word, impatience and a sullen face can destroy in a moment what we have taken so long to achieve.”

Throughout North America he is known for his commitment to education, evangelization and his care for the poor. The famous Laval University, the first to offer higher education in French, is named for this generous man of great faith.

#### **Slide 4**

##### **Reader:**

The proclamation of these two saints is timely—this year we celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first parish in North America outside of Spanish speaking territories—Notre-Dame-de-Quebec, and we are reminded of the importance of that “yes” to God’s call and of the missionary nature of the Church. For Niagara Catholic we are reminded of our call especially this year to witness to the joy of the gospel.

#### **Slide 5**

Through the lens of these holy lives, we can make many personal connections.

Am I willing to sacrifice to witness to faith? (slight pause)

What are my obstacles to witness? (slight pause)

Where am I being called to say “yes”—to a new challenge, to relationship, to forgiveness? (slight pause)

Loving and gracious God, we give thanks for the lives and witness of Saint Marie of the Incarnation and Saint Françoise de Laval. May our two new Saints strengthen all of us to build a better future that respects and reverences the contributions that diversity brings to our country and to our world.

May we be inspired by the examples of these two Saints to witness to the joy of the Gospel, and may we be willing to say “yes” to your call, wherever it may lead.

Amen.

Saint Marie of the Incarnation, pray for us.

Saint Françoise de Laval, pray for us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

##### **Sources:**

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