

Guay, Bill

Intel June 23/02 Sunday p.3

Bill Guay considers himself blessed to be finishing his teaching career in the same school where he started as a student almost a half century ago.

"There's something prophetic about that," said the 55-year-old Belleville resident who retires this week as principal of St. Michael Catholic School.

He is the only principal retiring from the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board.

Guay said history is important to him and retiring where he started "has a sense of history to it.

"It gives me a sense of connectedness with all the students and teachers who preceded me over the last century in that school. I believe we're all connected in the church and body of Christ and to me having concluded my career this way is a statement about that."

He added he couldn't be an educator now "without the contribution of all those great people from the past at St. Michael."

Guay has spent all his 33 years in education in this area. His career has been divided between the classroom/principal's office and the headquarters of the former Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Roman Catholic School board.

From 1982-92, for example, Guay served as consultant and then co-ordinator of religious education and helped write the provincial curriculum, Fully Alive, on behalf of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"This provincial program continues as an extension of the religion program in Catholic schools," he said. "It was and remains a professional resource for teachers and families and I'm proud of having a hand in developing the program."

Guay jokes that he started his teaching career one year after the release of the Hall-Dennis report in 1968 "which liberalized education and brought it to the modern era from what used to be the 'one curriculum suits all' mentality.

"Now I'm leaving with (Mike) Harris when he has returned to the one curriculum philosophy."

Guay acknowledges some changes in education were needed "but it was too fast, too radical and it put a burden on teachers."

He has witnessed lots of changes over the past three decades. The biggest is in the family itself, he noted.

"Most of our children are coming from families where both parents work," he said. "We have children who are more independent because their parents work and they are more responsible for themselves."

He said children today are much more capable than they were 30 years ago.

"The world they face is much more complicated and they have to be prepared to deal with it. So the challenge to schools is not only to educate in the traditional academic way but to help and assist with their social, spiritual and emotional well-being."

Guay said parents are also more interested and involved in their children's education.

"They know they have to help their children as much as they can to live in this world."

Educators themselves haven't changed much over the years, he believes.

"Teachers are still hard working, dedicated and sacrificing for their students. That vocation to teaching is still strong."

Guay has simple advice for teachers.

"You'd better love kids. And you have to know your profession...educators have to be prepared to accept change and adapt to today's realities."

The Belleville native began Grade 1 at St. Michael's Academy in 1953. He was only there for one year before transferring to Holy Rosary for the remainder of his elementary studies.

He returned to St. Michael's for Grades 9 and 10, then earned his high school diploma from Nicholson Catholic College and a year later graduated from Peterborough teacher's college.

Guay started his teaching career in 1969 at St. Mary's in Trenton.

Three years later, he moved to the board office to develop a family life and sexuality curriculum for the Catholic system. He remained at the headquarters for five years and oversaw the implementation of the curriculum.

In the fall of 1977, Guay was appointed principal of St. Mary's in Read. He also taught Grades 5-8 in the two-room school.

There were more leadership moves in his career. He was principal of St. Gregory's in Picton, then for a decade at the board office as religious education co-ordinator, and returned as principal at Sacred Heart in Marmora in 1992. He also spent two years as principal at Holy Rosary before going to St. Michael five years ago.

St. Michael is Belleville's largest Catholic elementary school with the building on Church Street dating back to 1908.

"I'm just pleased to have the opportunity to end my career at St. Michael with the highly supportive and interested parent community, very professional and caring teachers and an interesting and exciting student population."

Guay said his career has flown by because of the diversity that education brings.

"No two days are the same. That's good because it keeps me fresh."

He acknowledged the most rewarding part of his job was helping students who had learning difficulties.

"They need the most support and help and it's where I got my most pleasure in helping them and seeing them succeed."

Intelligencer - June 23/02 p.3 Sun