

Ken Loehndorf: Living his faith

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November 28, 2016 12:26 PM



Long time educator, Kenneth Loehndorf, of the Battlefords is the recipient of the prestigious Julian Paslawski Meritorius Service Award, awarded each year to those who have made a highly significant contribution to Catholic education in Saskatchewan. Left to right, Light of Christ Chair of the board, Glen Gantefoer, Julian Pawslawski, Ken Loehndorf and Paula Scott.

“There’s no doubt about the fact that my faith is basically who I am as a person and to be able to have been blessed to [do] my work in a faith-filled environment for the last 25 years has been an absolute blessing. There’s no doubt it has formed who I am as a person, but it has also allowed my faith to grow.”

For the past 25 years Ken Loehndorf has called North Battleford home. He first came to the community when he took a job as director of Light of Christ Catholic School Division.

Ten years ago, after serving for 15 years as director of education, Loehndorf retired and moved on to an executive director position with Saskatchewan Catholic School Boards Association. Loehndorf says he’s been blessed to have the career he has had, especially to have had the opportunity, as he puts it, to live his faith in his career.

Before moving into the Catholic school system 25 years ago, Loehndorf began his career in Rosetown, in the public school system as a physical education teacher.

“Doing what I wanted to do, it meant I had to move. When other opportunities came up it meant moving,” says Loehndorf.

Loehndorf had an image of what he wanted to do and that first meant working at a high school, although there were physical education positions open in elementary schools, he knew he wanted to be able to coach. Loehndorf’s commitment to the future he saw for himself led him, after five years in Rosetown, to Biggar.

In Biggar he was able to check the next goal off his list when he accepted his first principal position. Then, after a two-year stop in Marengo, still as a principal, Loehndorf found himself as the director of education in Gull Lake before, finally, seeing the career path he envisioned for himself lead to North Battleford as director of education at Light of Christ.

“[Director of education] was the kind of job I was hoping to get at some point and even more so because it was in a Catholic school system,” says Loehndorf.

“So when I had the chance 25 years ago to come to North Battleford to join the Catholic system I jumped at the opportunity. I knew when I moved to North Battleford that I would be here for a long time and would probably finish my career here.”

As the director of education for Light of Christ and now as the current executive director of the SCSBA, Loehndorf says what attracts him to the jobs is the opportunity to “walk the talk” and lead by example.

“For me, what I’m excited about, is the fact that we’re allowed to live our faith in Catholic schools on a daily basis. It allows us to be role models, faith role models, and pass on our faith to our children.”

Loehndorf doesn’t appear to take this role lightly. In his career, in his church and in his community, Loehndorf “lives [his] faith.”

As an educational leader, Loehndorf was “passionate and committed to ensuring publicly-funded Catholic education.”

Saskatchewan is one of three provinces in Canada that does so, which is something Loehndorf says he is grateful for.

“There was a lot of awesome work done by our forefathers when they created Saskatchewan. As part of that, in the Saskatchewan Act, they ensured into the future there would be publicly-funded Catholic education for their children. We are the benefactors of their work,” says Loehndorf, “and since that time, Catholic education has grown by leaps and bounds.”

The Catholic school system currently has approximately 39,000 students and 120 schools in eight divisions. Loehndorf notes there will always be people who disagree with publicly-funded religious education, so one goal has been to make their schools accepting of all people.

“We invite anybody who wants to come and receive a Catholic education. We welcome anyone,” he says.

“It’s a holistic education permeated with Catholic teachings. Our focus is being inclusive.

“In 1963 there was legislation passed to provide support for Catholic high schools in the province. The legislation actually says in communities where there is a public high school parents have the choice, parents have a legal right, for their children to attend a Catholic high school.”

Although there is legislation in place stating that any high school-aged student has the right to go to Catholic school, Loehndorf says it is also a policy followed by all elementary schools in the province. Working for the Catholic school system, especially as an educational leader, was also an important goal for Loehndorf having been a student in the Catholic system throughout his entire career as a student.

“I have seen the benefits of Catholic schools. I grew up going to Catholic schools from kindergarten to Grade 12 in Saskatoon,” he says.

“I’ve spent 25 years working hard and ensuring the schools I’ve worked with provide a distinctive Catholic education and that that is front and centre.”

Loehndorf says he sees these Catholic lessons being instilled in the young people he’s met and interacted with throughout his career in North Battleford, especially during times when we are tested.

“The most obvious is when tragedy happens and seeing how the school community and the faith community merge to support.”

“Fortunately in my career there haven’t been a large number, but we certainly see examples where there have been things like car accidents where kids gathered at our school and our chapel to support themselves and each other.”

The educational philosophy he practiced, Loehndorf says, is treating others with dignity and respect. To have compassion and integrity and recognizing and understanding that “everybody is a child of God.”

As an educational philosophy these rules to live by translates to students and staff, but Loehndorf clearly practices what he preaches with everyone around him.

Helping others and showing them your care is what Loehndorf refers to as living out his faith. In the past this has meant co-ordinating a mission trip to Lima, Peru with John Paul II students and his wife, Yvonne. The trip proved to be a memorable experience for Loehndorf, not only for the locals in Lima who showed how to live a life of faith and thankfulness despite having so little, but through the students from John Paul II who were living examples of the values Loehndorf has dedicated his career to passing on to others.

Recently, through his parish, St. Joseph Calasanctious, Loehndorf and his wife have been on a fundraising committee to sponsor a family of six from Syria who are currently displaced in a Jordanian refugee camp. Loehndorf estimates the parish committee will reach their fundraising goal by Christmas.

Next July, Loehndorf will be saying goodbye to his role as Executive Director of Saskatchewan Catholic School Boards Association. After ten years promoting and securing the best interest of Catholic education in the province, Loehndorf is ready to move on and devote his time to being a grandpa, although, wherever life takes him next, you can be sure it will be devoted to living his faith.

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