



## Strategic Directions



This, our second installment of Strategic Directions, focuses on Supportive Environments and Well-Being. And what an opportunity to do so! At a time when weather can be harsh and daylight hours scarce, at a time when Advent calls us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, at a time when the gap between the wealthy and the poor is so evident, it is crucial to reflect on how we can stay well and help others to do the same.

Earlier this year, I read a book called *The Happiness Advantage* by Harvard University's Shawn Achor. Achor claims, based on significant scientific evidence, that, "A quick burst of positive emotions . . . provides a quick and powerful antidote to stress and anxiety, which in turn improves our focus and our ability to function at our best level" (2010, p. 49). You might be thinking that a quick burst of positive emotions would follow something major, such as winning the lottery or going on vacation.

The truth is, positivity can be induced by something as simple as hearing a funny story, receiving a compliment, being included in a lunchtime conversation, receiving a thoughtful note, or finding that someone has swept the snow off our front step. These are not expensive gestures; they are, in fact, something just about anyone can do. Think about the last time someone did something like this for you. You might have had a little glow in your heart or a spring in your step as a result. After all, someone thought specifically about you. Why would it be any different for your students, parents, colleagues, friends, family, or neighbours?

This is not to undermine the greater acts of kindness many people undertake at this time of year. Initiatives such as **JoyFull Socks**, **Heaven Cent**, or **Christmas Cheer** can have a lasting impact on people's lives and are to be applauded. However, those other small gestures are reminders that each one of us is capable of making other people's lives better, every day, at very little or no cost.

If you visit my office, you will see a large statue of St. Thérèse of Lisieux standing on the desk. The statue is there in part because Thérèse is my middle name, but also because I appreciate her philosophy of **The Little Way**. I have taken great comfort in knowing that we do not all need to be superstars; small things done with great love can make a huge difference.

What is wonderful about such small gestures is that they not only help the person receiving them, but they also help the giver. In fact, Achor claims that, "acts of altruism—giving to friends and strangers alike—decrease stress and strongly contribute to enhanced mental health" (p. 52). Importantly, according to Achor, so can meditating, exercising, learning about our strengths, reframing how we view challenges, and being grateful.

This last idea, taking the time every day to think of things for which we are grateful, is something well worth pursuing. At a time when society tells us that we should be consuming more, at a time when the world seems to be moving at a frenetic pace, at a time when it is easy to overlook all the goodness that surrounds us, it is fitting to pause and reflect on the little things that make us smile and thank the good Lord. It is also fitting to try to give others more happy moments that they can add to their gratitude lists.

With that thought, I wish you all a blessed Advent. I am grateful for all you do and are.

God bless,

Rose Burton Spohn  
Director of Education

Quoi de neuf!



What's New!



Minwajjimo!



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