

Marian Statue Blessing and Dedication

Edmonton, Canada

venerdì, 26-Ott-18



By Michelle fcJ

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At Edmonton Catholic School District's Faith Day on Feb 6, 2018, Fr. Richard Leonard, SJ, spoke to the thousands of us gathered at the Shaw Conference Centre on the importance of our students seeing religious images, like the Holy Family, that reflect the truth of their non-European origins. Too long, he said, had students of various ethnic backgrounds looked at religious imagery in the Catholic tradition and seen white skin and European features.

With his talk, Fr Richard planted a seed. As I listened, I was struck by the fact that in my school, St. Thomas More Junior High School (STM), where there are more non-Caucasian students than Caucasian, the very white European looking statues of Jesus and Mary could not at all represent how these two crucial human figures in our church's history would have possibly looked. What's more, what message did it send to students that we displayed such a statue of Mary despite the fact we know that she was neither white skinned nor European? What did it say about our beliefs?

With the approval of Area Leader Sr Bonnie Moser, I soon began combing the Internet and any religious good stores I could find, looking for a possible Marian statue that we, the FCJs, could donate to the school in honour of our Bicentenary celebrations. It was a time consuming and far reaching search, one that finally ended at a little shop outside the Cathedral of St. Sulpice in Paris, France in July 2018. Here, I found a statue of Mary, holding a curious and engaged child Jesus in her supportive, loving arms. Both looked like they could have been at home outside of the confines of Europe.

Statue finally in hand, I set about looking for assistance in organizing a celebration that would honour Mary, the Mother of God and provide a space for the FCJ Sisters to formally gift the statue to STM School.

Art Teacher, Jen Sarnecki, supervised her students who created beautiful murals based on original images designed by Charles Prabst. Each mural is made from hundreds of pieces of coloured papers, torn from magazines. Each image is a scene from one of the Joyful Mysteries. Jen estimates that more than half of the 500 students at STM had a hand in adding pieces of paper to the murals.

Music Director Marino Coco and his choir students prepared a modern version of the Salve Regina, which both began and ended the Liturgy. I called for student volunteers to form a Dance Group, one that would allow for Sacred Dance in the celebration. Five female students faithfully came to every practice. Together, we created dance choreography to complement the words of the Salve



Regina as the Choir sang.

Students read Gospel readings and Rosary reflections to go with each of the Joyful Mysteries. I asked students and staff to pray the “Hail Mary” in different languages. We were led in English, Spanish, French, Italian and Arabic.

Srs Susan, Yvonne and Elizabeth from the Edmonton FCJ community joined us for the Liturgy and agreed to unveil the Statue to the school.

Father Glenn, a Basilian Father, came to share a reflection on the importance of the Rosary in his own life and to bless the statue. For the Offertory, about a dozen student volunteers placed flowers in vases sitting in the Sacred Space, where the newly blessed statue waited.



Principal Ryan Feehan gave permission and funds for a luncheon/reception after the Liturgy. Home Economics Teachers Gerrilynn Pavone and Alyssa Brotto led the students in cooking and presenting a delicious and filling meal for the STM staff and Sisters.

I was deeply moved by how many people said “Yes” to helping in all of the ways they were able to. The result was a lovely celebration of Mary and a space for everyone gathered to learn a little more about the Sisters Faithful Companions of

Jesus. The Statue now sits in the Library at STM. No doubt, most students who enter the room will go about doing their work without noticing her or the child she holds in her arms. However, I like to think that just by their presence they help my ethnically diverse students to imagine a world where God is a little less white, and a little more like them.



“ La nostra piccola Società ha come fine di glorificare il cuore di Gesù con ogni mezzo in suo potere. ”

Marie Madeleine d’Houët

Fedeli Compagne di Gesù

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