

NIAGARA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



427 Rice Rd., Welland ON

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www.niagaracatholic.ca

Danny Di Lorenzo
Chair of the Board

Camillo Cipriano
Director of Education

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We are a
CHRIST-CENTERED
CATHOLIC FAITH community
that celebrates diversity
and fosters SPIRITUAL GROWTH,
inspiring ALL to REACH
their FULL potential in
MIND, BODY, & SPIRIT

ENCOUNTERING SOULS
AND OPENING MINDS
SO that all students
SUCCEED

NIAGARA CATHOLIC ANNOUNCES 2026 AWARD OF DISTINCTION RECIPIENTS

Niagara Catholic District School Board Director of Education Camillo Cipriano is pleased to announce the 2026 recipients of the Niagara Catholic Education Award of Distinction.

Current trustee and Executive Director of the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education Jim Marino, and late Catholic teacher and long-time OECTA Niagara Elementary President Joseph McDonald were chosen by the selection committee earlier this month. Their selection was shared with trustees at the February 10 Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Public nominations for the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education opened last fall. Consideration was given to nominees who have made a notable, significant, and positive contribution to Catholic education.

Trustee Marino and Mr. McDonald both championed Catholic education for decades and are part of the strong foundation supporting the system today.

"Jim Marino is a man of great character and great faith," said Director Cipriano. "I first met him through the Foundation's support of students during the pandemic. Through his commitment, students who otherwise may not have had a way to access online learning received devices that allowed them to get online with their peers. Jim comes into the office several times a week, tirelessly seeking donations to support students with their needs. His faith guides him to focus on the good in everyone and to give back to the community in any way he can. In his role as trustee, he exemplifies grace, wisdom, and compassion in his thoughts and his actions.

"I did not have the privilege of knowing Mr. McDonald," he continued. "However, the passionate nomination clearly depicted who he was; faith-filled, principled, and committed to Catholic education. Both Jim and Joseph McDonald are truly worthy recipients of this prestigious award."

Chair of the Board Danny Di Lorenzo also offered his congratulations to Mr. Marino, and the Mr. McDonald's family.

"Jim Marino is a true champion of Catholic education," said Chair Di Lorenzo. "And I am truly blessed to work with him in my capacity as Chair of the Board of Trustees, and as a member of the Foundation's board. Jim is thoughtful, tenacious, and dedicated to serving Niagara Catholic. He dedicates hours of his time to the service of Niagara Catholic's students and families, and Niagara Catholic as an organization. He is a familiar face across the system, regularly attending events and celebrations, and has a positive word for everyone.

"Like Camillo, I did not know Joe McDonald personally, but the nomination brought forward told the story of a Catholic educator committed not only to his students, but also to his faith, who led by example in all that he did."

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"On behalf of the Niagara Catholic District School Board's Board of Trustees, I am pleased and proud to congratulate Jim Marino and the family of the late Joseph McDonald for their years of service, commitment, and support of Niagara Catholic and Catholic education."

Tickets are still available for the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education's Annual Benefit Gala, taking place at Club Roma on Thursday, March 5, 2026. Order tickets online through the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education's Annual Benefit Gala slide on the main page of niagaracatholic.ca.

Biographies of the 2026 recipients follow. Photos are attached.

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AWARD OF DISTINCTION – BIOS

JOSEPH MCDONALD

Although he served in many roles during his career in Catholic education, Joseph McDonald was a Catholic kindergarten teacher at his core.

At a time when there were very few male primary teachers – and even fewer male kindergarten teachers – Joe McDonald spent 15 years preparing the board's youngest learners for life. The lessons went beyond what they would need to know in Grade 1 and beyond to keep up with the curriculum. He let them explore tools and get messy, but most importantly, he showed students how to be a living example of Christ by his kindness, compassion, and caring.

He was, in the words of his nominator, "a passionate and vocal supporter of Catholic education, the educators he worked with, and the students he taught."

Teaching wasn't Joe's first career, but it was his last. When he answered the call to the vocation of Catholic education, he put his whole heart and soul into the role. Joe didn't limit himself to supporting the Catholic elementary schools where he worked (Our Lady of Victory, St. Mary, St. Alexander, and Alexander Kuska), he also coached boys' and girls' field lacrosse at Notre Dame College School.

Joe's reach went far beyond the classroom. For many years, he organized donations from Niagara Catholic and its preceding board in south Niagara for single mothers of children in our schools, ensuring they had food and toy vouchers while accessing the services of women's shelters. He was integral in the creating the annual backpack campaign supporting thousands of students across Niagara each year through the United Way.

During his tenure as OECTA's Niagara Elementary Unit President, Joe defended and promoted the constitutional rights to Catholic education in Ontario, and fair and equitable funding for all publicly funded schools. He also led fundraising campaigns benefitting the families of local teachers, students, Wells of Hope and Jericho House.

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AWARD OF DISTINCTION – BIOS

JOSEPH McDONALD, continued

Beyond his role as a Catholic educator and union president, Joe McDonald lived his faith with conviction. He built relationships with those around him, and deepening his relationships with his family, friends, and with God. He had a strong sense of justice, and was an early champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While much of the work Joe did to support people focused on Niagara, he also had interest in supporting people in need around the world. He visited Uganda several times and created lasting friendships with people there. During one visit, Joe promised a young man that if he became a Catholic priest, he would return to Uganda for his ordination. He lived up to his word and then returned for the priest's five-year anniversary.

Joe McDonald entered the kingdom of heaven in 2023. His life was truly an example of life lived in pursuit of service to others and to God and his legacy shines through the many lives he touched during his career.

For his unwavering commitment to Catholic education, we are proud recognize the late Joseph McDonald with a Niagara Catholic Education Award of Distinction.

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JIM MARINO

Jim Marino is known to generations of Niagara residents for the many roles he has held in his lifetime.

A broadcaster for 30 years, 16 of them in St. Catharines, as news director at CHSC AM and CHRE FM during the 1970s and 80s, when he was a part of the AM station's morning show team "chaired" by John Larocque, nicknamed the "Mayor of the Morning."

He then entered the political realm himself, serving first as a trustee on a small Catholic board representing Catholic schools in Niagara town and township and the former Lincoln County Roman Catholic Separate School Board, where he served as trustee and Chair. He became alderman for the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, was elected Lord Mayor of the municipality and, by extension, a member of Niagara Regional Council. In 2022, he closed the circle as an elected official, with his election as a Niagara Catholic District School Board trustee.

On the bureaucracy side of politics in Ottawa, Jim served as press secretary to Veterans Affairs Ministers the Hon. Gerry Merrithew and the Hon. Peter McCreath. He was then appointed communications advisor to the Hon. Kim Campbell, when she was Minister of Veteran's Affairs, prior to becoming Canada's first and only female Prime Minister.

In 2015, when Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Rob Nicholson, announced the establishment of an External Advisory Committee on religious freedom, Jim was appointed to serve as one of the 23 members from various Canadian faith and belief diversities.

With an impressive resume like that, Jim is especially proud of his roles as a Catholic school trustee, and as the Executive Director of the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education. He is in his office at the Catholic Education Centre four days a week raising funds to support the Foundation's mandate of assisting students in need with the energy of someone half his age; and has never missed a meeting of the Board of Trustees.

In both capacities, Jim is guided by love of church, family, and community.

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AWARD OF DISTINCTION – BIOS

JIM MARINO, continued

He believes passionately in the gift of Catholic education as a sacred treasure and has worked tirelessly to ensure that all students have access to a faith-based education.

As his nominators note, “Jim exemplifies the Catholic Social Teachings in practice, particularly the dignity of the human person, community service, and care for the vulnerable – shaping how the board’s charitable efforts are seen across Niagara Catholic schools and beyond.”

“Jim’s leadership reflects a deep belief that Catholic values must be lived in all aspects of education, from governance to community engagement and student support.”

Jim’s deep faith is his foundation. In broadcasting, he hosted Midnight Mass services on the air and fundraising programs in support of Monsignor Ray Montague’s missionary work in the Philippines.

He played an integral role in mobilizing sponsorship from the Regional Niagara community to support his broadcast reports of Pope John Paul II’s address to the United Nations, emphasizing Catholic witness in media.

He is deeply involved with his parish and diocesan ministries and is steadfast in his support of the Church and Catholic education.

Jim has dedicated more than half a century to the Holy Name Society, served as president at diocesan and parish levels, organized annual men’s retreats, fostering a lay Catholic community, served on parish councils, promoted partnerships between parishes and schools and remains an active Minister of the Word at Mass.

The Niagara Catholic Education Award of Distinction is the latest of many honours bestowed upon Jim throughout his many years of service, including the Papal medal *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* from Pope John Paul II in 2003 for distinguished lay service to the Church, Niagara University, Lewiston, N.Y.’s College of Education Department Community Leader of the Year (Ontario) Award in 2011, the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, and the Rotary Club, Niagara Falls, Ralph Harris Award in 2017.

For his unwavering commitment to Catholic education, we are proud to recognize Jim Marino with a Niagara Catholic Education Award of Distinction.