

# Renewal of Faith

*Fresh start found in Catholic school atmosphere*



*St. William student Payton Morand sits in one of the school's classrooms. Since enrolling at the school in 2014, she has immersed herself in her faith journey.*

(Lakeshore, Ontario, Monday, May 2, 2016) – A couple of years ago, Payton Morand was looking for a fresh start. She ended up with a new perspective on life.

A Grade 8 student at St. William Catholic Elementary, Payton has only been enrolled at the Emeryville school since the beginning of seventh grade. However, in the short time she's been there, she has found a new direction on her spiritual journey by fully embracing the Catholic faith.

"She's an amazing girl," said Denise Masse, a Grade 4 teacher and the school's faith ambassador. "Her thirst to learn more about her faith is very strong."

Payton had been attending nearby Lakeshore Discovery Public School, but due to a boundary change, many of her friends began attending another school. A friend told her that St. William is a really good school, especially for sports.

An athletic girl who plays travel soccer for the East Side Kickers, she brought up the subject of changing schools with her parents. Masse met with the family when they were considering enrolling Payton at the school, and said they were interested in sports, but also very curious about how religion was taught there. Payton's father is Catholic, however she was raised in the Anglican faith. They ultimately decided that St. William would be a good fit for their daughter, and she started Grade 7 there in September of 2014.

May 1-6 is Catholic Education Week, and this year's theme is *Opening Doors of Mercy*. In 2014, the WECD SB literally opened its doors by changing its acceptance guidelines to allow non-Catholics entrance into its elementary schools, so long as they agreed to respectfully participate in all faith-based activities.



Participating hasn't been a problem for Payton. After having been immersed in the faith-filled environment of the school for a while, she went home one day and told her parents that she was considering converting to Catholicism. After a thoughtful discussion with her parents, her father told her that she had reached a level of maturity to make that decision on her own.

Since being confirmed, she has become completely engaged with all of the school's faith activities and was even honoured at its Holy Thursday mass at Good Shepherd Parish.

"It's a really good school," said Payton, who plays on the school's soccer, basketball, and volleyball teams. "It's very welcoming, and the teachers are all fantastic. Everyone is encouraged to do their best, and it's a really good environment."

Being in a faith-filled academic environment, she said is "like a bonus." She often goes to church on Sundays with her family, but now she gets to go to school masses with her classmates. She enjoys seeing how others react to Bible readings and homilies and has developed a close relationship with a new friend at the school who she can discuss her beliefs with.

Her faith, she said, is what guides her in making important life decisions.

“You have experience and knowledge, but your faith just helps you get through everyday situations,” she said. “It’s just about being the best person you can be. You want to be a whole person.”

Payton’s story is one that speaks to everything the WECDSB hopes to accomplish, according to Director of Education Paul Picard.

“Our priority is to create an atmosphere that nurtures the faith journey of all our students,” he said. “By opening our doors, we’re welcoming everyone to join us in that journey. Payton has clearly done just that.”

Payton hasn’t decided where she will attend high school yet, but said she hopes to get a scholarship either for academics or soccer when she’s finished, and eventually wants to be a pediatrician.

In the meantime, she’ll continue her journey at St. William by inspiring her friends and trying to be a good example for others.

“She has a genuine love of God that she’s willing to share with her friends,” Masse said. “Other students at the school look up to her. We’re lucky to have her here.”