



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the past number of days we have witnessed significant media commentary pertaining to Bill 10, a recent legislative attempt to promote safe, caring and inclusive communities in schools. Students experiencing same-sex attraction were singled out in the bill for special attention, and much of the debate has centred on whether the government should mandate what are called Gay-Straight Alliances to help these children feel safe and cared for. A serious attempt was made in the proposed legislation to reconcile the right of students to be safe with the rights of parents and schools pertaining to the education and formation of children.

The bill has been placed on hold, yet public debate around it has continued. The commentary has not always been kind to the leadership of our Catholic schools, and might lead one to conclude from our principled objections to certain aspects of Bill 10 that we have little concern for students of same-sex attraction. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. The purpose of this brief pastoral letter is to offer to the Catholic community what I hope will be some helpful information.

Catholic schools insist that the approach to protecting children be a fully inclusive one. Sadly, students may be subjected to bullying for a variety of reasons, such as race, body image, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and others. Cyber-bullying is a particularly terrible phenomenon from which no student is immune. We fully support the government's laudable goal of fostering safe environments in schools. In fact, we already have policies for this very purpose. Any legislation aimed at this objective should demonstrate to all vulnerable students that they are embraced by the province's concern.

This one goal of creating safe, inclusive environments can be attained in many ways. This is why we challenge any suggestion that one method be not only privileged among others but also mandated. Furthermore, our rights as Catholic schools are engaged here. All aspects of school life must be permeated by our faith. The exercise of this right requires the freedom to determine both the name and content of our initiatives so as to accord with our doctrine.

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I often have the great joy of visiting our Catholic schools. In any visit, it is abundantly clear to me that our teachers, administration and staff love their students and are fully committed to the provision of safe and caring environments for them. I am proud of our schools and of the careful attention they give to the unique needs of each of the students. No child is excluded! Our beloved children need help today to navigate a host of very complex issues, including that of human sexuality. In all matters we guide our children in accordance with the faith of the Church, as is our right. We are confident that our doctrine is a sure guide to authentic human flourishing and happiness.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



✠Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton

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