

ONE HEART: Ministering by Love

Policy Promoting Equity and Respect for All
Students

7/24/2013

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Whitehorse

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Policy for Catholic Schools in the Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Whitehorse

A. Message from the Bishop of Whitehorse

May the Holy Spirit guide us and give us courage to listen deeply to and care compassionately for all the students entrusted to us in the Catholic Schools as well as to all young Catholics in the Diocese of Whitehorse. In truth and charity we must give particular care to adolescents and young adults who have questions about same-sex attraction. This policy statement is intended as a resource to support Catholic school and pastoral staff in the Diocese of Whitehorse in this important ministry.

The Most Reverend Gary M. Gordon
Bishop of Whitehorse
July 24, 2013



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B. Context

The Catholic community supports government initiatives that are just and motivated by respect for the difference and integrity of the separate Catholic school system. Clearly, respect for students can be pursued from within a distinctly Catholic perspective, described in these pages. The policies, principles, and guidelines in these pages are in fulfillment of the Church's responsibility to educate students in the Roman Catholic faith and morality.

C. Policy Statement

The Catholic Schools of Whitehorse value diversity and strive to provide learning environments that are safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming of the uniqueness of each and every student.

This document articulates the vision of the human person and morality at the heart of the Catholic faith, guidelines and resources for implementation, and the complaint procedure to be followed at Vanier Catholic Secondary School, Christ the King Elementary School and Holy Family Elementary School. A fuller articulation of the Church's teachings with respect to the matters discussed in this document is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and "A Guide for Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same Sex Attraction."¹

¹ Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops "Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction (June 2011)". <http://www.cccbpublications.ca/>

BACKGROUND

D. In the Context of the Catholic Faith

This document is in no way the definitive text on Catholic morality. Our focus is specific: the pastoral needs of adolescent and young adults who question their sexual identity or experience feelings of same-sex attraction. In the reading and application of this resource a number of considerations are to be kept in mind:

- 1) All persons share the same rights and dignity and are called to live as God's children. In its document, "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (1986), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirms this truth, and condemns violations of it.
- 2) The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Today the Catholic Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person in refusing to define the person principally as a heterosexual or a homosexual, affirming rather that every person has a more fundamental identity: a creature of God and, by grace, a child of God and heir to eternal life.
- 3) It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violence or malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It expresses a disregard for others that endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each and every person must always be respected in word, in action, and in law.
- 4) God's presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of Christian life. Whatever our call, whatever our state in life – married, single, vowed religious, ordained—we are to live chastely. Chastity as the single-hearted love of God, is not restricted to the very few in monasteries or in religious vows. Through chaste living, thus understood, and with the help of God's grace, we strive to fulfill God's loving purpose for our lives. Since chastity is a way of loving, it entails far more than the avoidance of sin. Like all expressions of authentic love, it is disciplined, and through this discipline it grows, it develops, it flourishes. Like all expressions of love, chastity entails not only



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self-control but perseverance. Through the gift of the Spirit we have the assurance that chaste living is possible for us all and can become a source of great joy.

- 5) Children, adolescents and young adults need to be taught by word and example that chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of the human person in his or her bodily and spiritual being. Through chaste love Christians can be fulfilled in all aspects of life, including the gradual integration of their sexuality.

E. Catholic Teaching on Human Sexuality²

Here follows a condensation of the Catholic Church's teachings on morality and human dignity insofar as it touches on the topic of same-sex attraction. Additional information on the Church's teachings on the topic of same-sex attraction is found in "A Guide for Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same Sex Attraction."³

1) The Catholic Church and Morality

The primary teaching document of the Catholic Church is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). The CCC is essentially a guide for how to live as a good Catholic. It is to this resource that we should turn whenever we are seeking guidance on any particular question, although we should always remember that the CCC is an authoritative précis, not a complete exposition, of Catholic teaching. There are four part of the CCC: what Catholics believe (Part 1: Profession of Faith), how Catholics worship (Part 2: Celebration of the Christian Mystery), how we are to act (Part 3: Life in Christ), and how we pray (Part 4: Christian Prayer). The topic of homosexuality is found in Part 3: Life in Christ, that part of the CCC concerning morality. The Church's teaching on

² Section E of this document is largely indebted to *Respecting Difference*, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (2012) 7-8.

³ Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction (June 2011). <http://www.cccbpublications.ca/>

homosexuality is a development and extension of its teaching on human sexuality. In order to more fully appreciate the topic of homosexuality, it is necessary to situate the discussion within the broader context of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality.

2) *The Catholic Faith Rejects Injustice and Affirms Human Dignity*

From the perspective of the Roman Catholic faith, every human person is created in the image of God. Every human being is a child of God. Thus, respect is due everyone regardless of race, gender, age, stage of development, disability, sexual orientation, class or religion. The Catholic Church stands resolutely against injustice, inclusive of injustice in interpersonal relationships such as acts of bullying. The scourge of bullying in education and in society must be resisted in Catholic schools and in the Catholic community at large. Bullying, be it verbal, physical, or social is not to be tolerated in any measure whatsoever.

*Catholics ought to be exemplary in treating persons with homosexual inclinations first and foremost as human beings created by God and worthy of respect. The Church's teaching emphasizes this attitude: "It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law."*⁴

F. Guidelines for Assuring a Safe Environment

The Catholic Schools of Whitehorse endeavour to provide a safe and caring school environment that is free from discrimination or bullying for all students at all times. However, it is recognized that students of same-sex attraction or same-sex identity are at higher risk of discrimination and/or bullying than the general student population.

The Catholic Schools of Whitehorse will:

⁴ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986), n.10. See also *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-sex Attraction*, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011, p.5. <http://www.cccbpublications.ca/>



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- actively promote a welcoming, safe environment rooted in gospel values of love, justice, and compassion;
- not tolerate derogatory remarks or jokes, name-calling or harassment in the school, and act immediately if and/or when such occurs, with the necessary and appropriate disciplinary response;
- work for school-wide support and age-appropriate education for understanding and tolerance of sexual minorities, seeking appropriate Catholic curriculum materials and library resources that broaden the awareness of positive role models in this regard among writers, historians, scientists, artists, musicians, and spiritual leaders;
- provide assemblies and information campaigns for zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental/physical abilities) and include attention to matters of sexual orientation;
- identify at least one “Safe Contact” for students with questions of same-sex attraction or concerns about sexual identity students, and
- provide all staff with the required training and resources to ensure these procedures are implemented.

G. Guidelines for All Staff

- Make it clear that harassment and discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated in staff rooms, classrooms, hallways, or anywhere on school property.
- Respect the confidentiality of students.
- If applicable, ensure that the required lessons on sexual morality outlined in educational curriculum documents for your grade are taught well. If you are uncomfortable with, or not knowledgeable about the topic, seek help from department heads, consultants and/or school administration.
- Inform yourself about the needs of and resources for students.
- Do not assume that all students and/or members of their families are heterosexual.
- Do not label students, that is, as homosexual, gay, or lesbian.

- During classroom discussions do not suggest that a student should disclose his or her same-sex orientation to parents, family and friends. Such a decision is the student's, in his or her own time.

H. Student Groups

If students or staff make a request to form a support group to advance the well-being of students of same-sex attraction and/or students with questions of sexual identity to advance the goals of the mission statement of the Catholic Schools of Whitehorse, school administrators will facilitate such a group in collaboration with the school counselors and school council.

The following guidelines apply to any group that addresses issues of diversity, discrimination and /or anti-bullying at any of the three Catholic Schools:

- 1) Any and all students may participate;
- 2) The name any such group is “One Heart: _____”. (e.g. “One Heart: Gay/Straight Catholic Allies” or “One Heart: Stop Cyber-Bullying”, or simply “One Heart”);
- 3) The signs or symbols of the group will include a heart and cross;
- 4) The group will operate in a safe, open, educational, healing environment to meet, discuss, and socialize;
- 5) All students involved in “One Heart” must agree to strict privacy guidelines including restrictions of all personal electronic devices during meetings, posting on social media sites or breaking of confidentiality of any discussion held in meetings. Failure to do so may result in the suspension of the group.
- 6) A staff adviser appointed by the school administrators in consultation with the Bishop must be present for all official meetings from beginning to end;
- 7) Speakers, programs, resources and outside school events should be planned in advance and approved by the school administration after consultation with the Bishop of Whitehorse;
- 8) All materials, whether for group use or public/community awareness must be vetted by the staff adviser and school administrator(s). It is suggested that any new material be submitted a minimum of 30 days prior to event or meeting.
- 9) If fundraising is done for a charitable organization, the choice of the organization must be vetted by the staff adviser and school administrator(s) so as to ensure compatibility with the Catholic faith.



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- 10) If the Bishop becomes aware that any group is providing instruction and/or counseling which are contrary to the teachings of the Church, the Bishop has the right to require the group to cease such inconsistent action, and if such action persists, to require that the group be disbanded.

I. Complaint Procedure

Respect for students can be pursued from within a distinctly Catholic perspective that informs the life and practice of a Catholic school. It is altogether possible that there will be plausible complaints brought to administrators for adjudication. The following procedure for registering and adjudicating complaints is formulated within the framework of a recognition of the difference and integrity of the separate Catholic school system. The view of the human person, sexuality and sexual expression and the understanding of what constitutes the common good and the requirements of justice may be often difficult to explain to others outside a Catholic context. Part of the respect owed Catholics and the integrity of the separate school system is that those outside it try in earnest to understand it or at least not stand in opposition to it.

We strive to maintain a standard of ‘discipline with dignity.’ That is, we will treat each case individually and make every attempt to discipline fairly with the desired goal of restitution. Restitution is not limited to material goods such as a broken window or restoring vandalised surfaces, but includes the more important aspect of restoring broken relationships. Discipline is only effective if the individual is able to understand the break in relationship, the necessity of repairing it, the need to pay for damages (if applicable) as well as the necessity of changing that behavior. Hopefully, restoring dignity to all parties will be the result.

Students report student and staff violations⁵ to a school administrator (i.e. principal or vice-principal). In cases of a student violation, the following procedures are to be observed:

⁵ This Policy is concerned with bullying and/or harassment that is not criminal in nature. In the event of a criminal act and/or investigation, other legislation, including the *Criminal Code*, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* and/or the *Child and Family Services Act*, may apply.

1. A record of the event must be made upon hearing of the complaint, detailing those involved, the type of incident, and steps taken toward redress. This record must be kept on file and kept confidential. The record should be kept separate from the student's School Record (i.e. in a Discipline Record).
2. An investigation must follow from the initial complaint. As bullying is often a complex and painful experience, the utmost care and sensitivity must be practised. At a student's request, a specific member of the staff may be present during his or her discussions with the principal and/or vice-principal. At all times, disclosure to staff shall be on a strictly need-to-know basis, unless the student requests otherwise.
3. The parents of the students involved should be notified following the initial complaint.
4. After the facts have been established, reconciliation must be attempted. If the event involves known persons, those persons should be brought together in a way to address the grievance and move toward reconciliation. For the sake of the privacy and dignity of the students involved, a meeting should involve only the students, an administrator, the parents, and, on request, the staff member involved with the initial complaint.
5. If the event involves damage or vandalism to a student's property by unknown persons, the school administration must take appropriate action to make immediate restitution.
6. A record of the consequences of the reconciliation must be added to the file.
7. At all times, the privacy of both students will be maintained to the greatest degree possible.

Parents who wish to lodge a complaint under this policy are directed to use the School Council's dispute resolution policy.

Where a complaint is made about an educator, administrators and/or the Superintendent will use the appropriate mechanisms as outlined in the Yukon Government/Yukon Teachers' Association (YTA) Collective Agreement and the YTA Code of Ethics.

J. Pastoral Assistance

The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Whitehorse, as well as all our Catholic communities and parishes, seek to create environments for young people to be to fully alive as children of God so that they can become all they were created to be. The pastoral assistance outlined here is offered in the spirit of the Father of the Church, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."



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In accord with the Catholic faith so vital to the Catholic institutions serving the common good of society, the pastoral aim of this document is to provide assistance to the school and pastoral staffs in the Diocese of Whitehorse as they strive to affirm the God given life and dignity of each person from conception to natural death.

Administrators, teachers, parents, and students all have a part to play in creating a culture of life and justice so that each young person can have life and have it to the full. This resource is but one aspect of assisting our schools and parishes to be communities of nurture, living a life of charity, truth and justice in our relations with one another so that all forms of bullying and unjust discrimination toward persons of same sex attraction is eliminated from speech and action.

The very nature of the Catholic school as outlined in our mission statement⁶ creates a whole school environment that ultimately addresses every form of discrimination and bullying. The principles, guidelines and suggestions for pastoral assistance herein are based upon, and are to be understood as an integral part of, the mission statement of the Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Whitehorse which recognizes each student as a unique person deserving a holistic education of mind, body and soul.

K. A Basic Pastoral Skill: Knowledge

What is needed by guidance counsellors, chaplains, pastors, and Catholic educators in order to apply prudent pastoral practice to students regarding sexuality?

- an appreciation of the values of forgiveness, humility and spiritual growth in the Spirit of Christ;
- an understanding of the Church's teaching on the human person, sexuality and marriage;
- an appreciation for the Catholic Church's interpretation of scripture;
- an understanding of the emotional, physical, social, spiritual and sexual development of adolescents;

⁶ See "Catholic Schools of Whitehorse Admission Package" 25 February 2012.

- respect for the dignity of persons with same-sex attraction;
- an understanding of one’s own attitudes about same-sex attraction and those who are questioning their sexual identity;
- a willingness to gain accurate information about same-sex attraction and sexual identity, and
- a knowledge of the content in Family Life Programs used within Catholic schools.

L. Practical Suggestions

The prudent counsellor, chaplain, pastor, or Catholic educator remembers that the person asking for assistance is a unique individual made in the image and likeness of God. The process of assimilation into Christ is also unique and different for each individual.

The Diocese shall designate a diocesan resource person who will be available to provide additional support and resources to school staff, and to assist students, parents or teachers in obtaining additional counselling or support services, as required from time to time.

The following are some suggestions for educators, counsellors, chaplains and pastors when dealing with a student who wishes to discuss their same-sex orientation or sexual identity:

- Assure them of confidentiality except where you are required by law to disclose information⁷. Some also include in this ground rule that they will not be able to maintain confidentiality if what is shared is illegal or dangerous to the student or others.
- The student may use language that is unknown to you, words such as “LGBTQ.” Terminological clarification regarding language of sexual identity and “gender identity” may be found in Yukon Education’s “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” policy and elsewhere.
- Use the vocabulary that the student uses. If the student uses “homosexual” or “lesbian/gay” follow her or his lead.
- Be aware that the student trusts you; so do not overreact or seem surprised by the disclosure.
- Provide a safe, confidential place to discuss the concerns of the student.

⁷ See e.g. the *Child and Family Services Act*, S.Y. 2008, c.1 s.22 (duty to report child in need of protection)



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- Listen calmly and offer non-judgmental responses that will encourage further dialogue, for example: “What you are concerned about?” Or: “How does that make you feel?”
- Be aware that the student may be experiencing grief related to loss, sadness, anger, denial, or confusion because of negative attitudes of society toward people with a same-sex orientation. If a student has experienced discrimination or bullying at the school or on the school bus, this must be addressed immediately through the procedure outlined in Section “L” below.
- Do not put words in the student’s mouth. Allow him/her to express their concerns. The role of the educator, counsellor, chaplain or pastor is to help the student deal with the information the student presents. If a supportive environment is provided, a young person who would like to talk about their sexual orientation or sexual identity will be more likely to do so.
- A student may appear confused about their sexuality. They are to be assured that this is not unusual and that their sexual identity will likely become clearer.
- The counsellor, educator, pastor or chaplain is to be aware of his/her own limitations. His/her role is to be a good listener and allow the student to talk.
- Some helpful questions might be:
 - +Does the student have friends he or she can trust with the information being disclosed?
 - + Do the student’s parents know this information? What would happen if they knew?
 - +If the parents cannot support the student, are there other adults available for support outside the school environment?
- Offer to continue to meet with the student if he or she so wishes, unless a referral is in order due to the staff member’s limitations or the student’s needs. In that case, ask the student if he/she would allow you to refer him/her to an appropriate diocesan resource person. It is important for the student’s self-esteem and safety that they take the lead in this regard and give you permission to refer them. This also reinforces confidentiality.

Compliment them on their courage in dealing with the challenging task of self-discovery.

Remind the student that God’s love is revealed through people who care about one another and help each other grow into the fullness of life.

M. References:

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986)

Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association *A Resource for an Inclusive Community* (June 13 2001)

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board *Community Support for Students: Open Arms* (September 2011)

Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction* (June 2011)

Ontario Assembly of Catholic Bishops *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation*, 2004

Ontario Catholic School Trustee' Association *"Respecting Difference" A Resource for Catholic Schools in the Province of Ontario Regarding the Establishment and Running of Activities or Organizations Promoting Equity and Respect for All Students.* (January 25, 2012)

Catechism of the Catholic Church