



## MEMO

**TO:** Directors of Education

**CC:** Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario  
Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario  
Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education  
Ontario Catholic School Business Officials' Association  
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association  
Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association  
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

**FROM:** Michael Pautler, Executive Director

**DATE:** May 19, 2020

**RE:** **Affirming our Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusive School Communities**

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In many Ontario communities, June is designated as the month celebrating PRIDE, and many Catholic school boards, Catholic universities, and Catholic hospitals receive requests to offer messages of support or participate in such community events. The advocacy and pressure to make such statements comes not only from the media and the broader community but often from students, staff, and families of students within our communities who identify as LGBTQ. While this issue is experienced differently in regions across the province, Catholic school boards frequently receive requests to make public statements supporting the principle of equity and inclusion, and it is generally true that the expectations and demands have escalated over time. This topic has been a subject for discussion throughout the last year, both at ECCODE, and amongst the bishops of the ACBO.

**ACBO Spring Plenary:**

As an initiative arising from these discussions, a number of messages and visual images were developed as examples that might assist Catholic school boards to proactively address community-based celebrations of diversity, equity and inclusion. The intention was to develop potential messaging with distinctively Catholic language and perspective. During the Spring 2020 Plenary meeting of the ACBO the bishops reviewed a number of potential messages and visual images and had further discussion. While individual bishops hold a range of personal perspectives on the matter, collectively they do understand the need for Boards to communicate the commitment to ensuring safe and welcoming communities.

- The bishops recognize and value the good work of Catholic schools in providing support and accompaniment to students who may identify as LGBTQ and expressed their appreciation
- The bishops understand the need for Boards to communicate their commitment to ensuring equitable, safe, and inclusive school communities
- The bishops are supportive of Boards taking a positive and proactive approach to express this commitment

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY MESSAGING:

Subsequent to the plenary meeting, the communications materials were further refined in response to the feedback provided by the bishops. The sample messages and visual images attached are intended to assist Boards that might be considering issuing proactive statements regarding equity, diversity and inclusion.

Some general comments to consider in reviewing the materials provided:

- 1) The messaging focuses on the inherent dignity of each human person and emphasizes our common humanity. Because each person is wholly created from God's bountiful goodness and gifted with essential dignity and worth, we all share a gospel mandate and a moral imperative to respect one another as persons. The recurring theme in the proposed messages emphasizes the goodness of God's creation, using the tagline '**We are all wonderfully made**'. The bishops have had an opportunity to review and discuss this material and so would be familiar with the language in these statements or comparable messages or images that strongly resemble the samples provided. While the messages are not 'approved' by the bishops, they indicated as a group that they had no objections to the language included.
- 2) The intention is to assist boards with statements that affirm the commitment of Catholic schools to principles of equity and inclusion that would be well received by students, families, staff and the public. Such messaging may potentially have the effect of pre-empting unfair and inaccurate negative media attention and public criticism that has been directed at some Catholic school boards in the past. The messages support the desire of Catholic schools to embrace appropriate ways to live out the gospel and extend hospitality to all, practically and symbolically, while being consistent with Church teaching.
- 3) A variety of messages are provided, each comparable with slightly different emphasis. The proposed sample materials are not intended to pre-empt the autonomous decisions of the local boards, but to encourage as much consistency of messaging as possible amongst those boards intending to proceed with proactive communication about equity and inclusion. As modelled in the examples provided, boards using materials might choose to include an explicit reference to PRIDE day/week/month as a context for their message or not. Depending on local history and situation, some boards believe it would be helpful to make the context of the statement explicit while others may view it as unnecessary or politically problematic. This approach allows boards latitude in terms of how general or how explicit a statement they choose to adopt, reflecting the reality of local community context while maintaining the desired consistency of message and approach.
- 4) Discussion amongst Directors suggests there is not complete unanimity on this issue, and it is likely that school boards will adopt a variety of approaches, with some boards choosing statements from the sample materials or choosing to issue their own messages while other boards may choose not to issue any statement. It remains a local decision whether school boards choose to issue proactive statements affirming the inclusive nature of Catholic school communities, and boards ultimately own the decision about what approach they take, if any.

- 5) Sample images have been prepared in a variety of formats and files will be provided upon request. Available formats include: **PDF, EPS (Vector), SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics), JPG, PNG and TIF files**. Please have your office or your Communications department indicate which image or images are of interest ([office@iceont.ca](mailto:office@iceont.ca)) and we will forward requested files and technical information.

**SUMMARY:**

The communications materials and sample messages are provided for your information, and for your use as appropriate to support any locally determined strategy to positively and proactively affirm the commitment of your school board to Catholic school communities that are safe, welcoming and inclusive. Open and ongoing discussion between the Director of Education, the Diocese and other educational partners is always helpful to ensure that we are all positioned to be supportive of one another in our respective roles.

The Institute for Catholic Education remains available to assist and support your local efforts in any way that we can. As always, your support of ICE and our initiatives is very much appreciated.

Attachment



**Messaging to Support  
Equity/Diversity/Inclusion**

**WE ARE ALL WONDERFULLY MADE!**

- I June is the month traditionally devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which for Catholics is a sign and symbol of God’s boundless and passionate love for all humanity. [The month of June is also designated as PRIDE month in \(the region of..., the city of... many communities across Ontario,...\)](#). This month, and each and every month, our Catholic schools are committed to nurturing safe and inclusive learning environments where every student and every member of the community is welcomed, valued, and respected.

As Catholics, we believe that we are all made in the image and likeness of a God who created us and loves us unconditionally – just as we are. We are called to know, love and celebrate one another, just as God knows, loves and celebrates each one of us because we are wonderfully made. We honour the inherent dignity in each other by treating one another with sensitivity, compassion and respect.

- II The XYZ Catholic District School Board celebrates diversity within our school communities and welcomes and values all children. As Catholics, we believe that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We are called to see each other through God’s eyes – with sensitivity, compassion and respect, and we see God in one another –wonderfully made, just as we are. As we live, learn and work together, we encourage one another to celebrate the glorious discovery of how we are made and loved by a God who knows us intimately and who invites us into a deeper relationship with Himself.

[The month of June is designated as PRIDE month in \(the region of..., the city of... many communities across Ontario,...\)](#). This month, and every month, XYZCDSB is committed to nurturing safe and inclusive learning environments where every student and every member of our community is welcomed, valued, and respected.

- III As Catholics, we believe that we are wonderfully made in the image and likeness of a God who created us and loves us unconditionally – just as we are. We are called to love and celebrate one another, just as God loves and celebrates each one of us. We honour the inherent dignity in each other by treating one another with care, compassion, and respect. [The month of June is designated as PRIDE month in \(the region of..., the city of... many communities across Ontario,...\)](#). This month, and each and every month, our Catholic schools are committed to nurturing safe and inclusive learning environments where every student and every member of the community is welcomed, valued, and respected.

Diversity Image 1



Diversity Image 2



Diversity Image 3



Diversity Image 4



Diversity Image 5

