

Consideration for Registering Children of Other Faiths

Background

When a principal is asked to admit children of other faiths, he/she should refer to the policy of the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, *Admission to Catholic Schools (A-2007-00-00)* and make a copy of the policy available to the parents. This resource has been developed as an addendum to the policy.

Children of Other Faiths

In this age of ecumenism and sensitivity to other religious traditions, the contemporary Catholic school can perform a service if it is able to admit children of other faiths. It enables the Catholic students to learn about the religious beliefs, attitudes and practices of other faiths. It also enables the non-Catholic students to understand the religious beliefs, attitudes and practices of the Catholic community.

However, in deciding a course of action in a particular case, there are considerations which must be explored.

- We acknowledge that all students are at varying stages of development. In order to integrate into the school environment more easily, the non-Catholic student ideally needs to be able to appreciate, to a reasonable extent, the distinctive expectations of the Catholic curriculum of the school.
- We realize that students function at varying levels of maturity, but those who wish to attend Catholic schools must be willing to accept its purpose and goals. If non-Catholic students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) wishing admission can assure the school's administration of their willingness to make their best effort to demonstrate this attitudinal consideration, the admission request deserves support.

Reflective Question to Guide Administrators

When reflecting upon the question of the non-Catholic student in the Catholic elementary school, one should remember that the Catholic school is called to be a community of faith within which an evangelizing and catechizing ministry is being fulfilled. The school must be committed to being a community, a community of faith wherein the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. The parent seeking admission for his or her child must appreciate that commitment.

The following questions may be useful for school administrators in assessing the level of understanding of the non-Catholic student in regard to the mandate of the Catholic school:

- i) Does the student understand, accept and express a willingness to support actively the philosophy and goals of the school?
- ii) Is the student willing to attend and participate in religion and family life classes?

- iii) Does the student realize that he or she will be expected to attend liturgical celebrations of the school and participate only to the extent deemed appropriate by the Church for a non-Catholic?
- iv) Is the student willing to relate responsibly to the members of the school community, whether adults or students?
- v) Is the student willing to cultivate his or her personal talents and abilities to the extent that he/she is able?
- vi) Is the student willing to participate in programs or services sponsored by the school?

Pupils of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools

Non-Catholic students are entitled to attendance in a Catholic secondary school as a matter of law. The fact, however, that students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) have a statutory right to admission should not preclude reasonable efforts on the part of the school principal to explore with them the unique expectations on them as members of a Catholic school community.

The right to attend does not bring with it the right to ignore or dismiss reasonable school expectations for behavior and participation in the life of that school. Those expectations need to be clearly expressed to registering students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) in a positive and welcoming fashion and to be accepted by them.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of Other Faiths and the Catholic School

It is essential that the principal explore with non-Catholic parent(s)/guardian(s) their reasons for the application and their expectations for their student if enrolled in a Catholic school. During this discussion, the principal is able to explain significant issues that relate to the nature and purpose of the Catholic school. These issues should be shared frankly, but with respect for the convictions of the non-Catholic parent(s)/guardian(s). It may be particularly important, where applicable, to discuss issues around sacramental preparation. As well, at this time, the non-Catholic parent(s)/guardian(s) should have the opportunity to express their views and to ask clarifying questions. After this discussion, both parties will be better able to determine whether the student should or should not be enrolled.

The non-Catholic parent(s)/guardian(s) must understand that the Catholic school participates in the pastoral/educational and evangelizing/catechizing mission of the Church. It is a setting within which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, explained and experienced (Form A). A letter describing the status of their child(ren) with regard to the reception of the Sacraments should be given to the parent(s)/guardian(s) at the time of the initial registration of the child(ren).

Conclusion

The Catholic school is called to fulfill an invaluable function within contemporary society. Those who are privileged to exercise a leadership role within the school must create and cultivate an environment within which the goals of Catholic education can be achieved.

The nature, purpose and goals of the school can be enhanced by welcoming non-Catholics who have expressed their willingness to join the community. The school can and must be a community of faith in which an

evangelizing and catechizing ministry is being fulfilled.

The Catholic school must be a truly pastoral setting in which all of the participants – adults and student, Catholic and non-Catholic - are invited, comforted, challenged, enriched, renewed, strengthened and supported. In doing so, the spiritual lives of all concerned are enhanced. We learn from and about one another and we are better for that experience.

Other Resources

1. Nostra Aetate, Vatican II, Rome, 1965
2. “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions”, Congregation for Non-Christians, Rome, 1984
3. “Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith”, Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, 1982
4. “The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School”, Rome, 1988
5. “The Catholic School”, Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, 1997
6. “General Directory for Catechesis”, Congregation for the Clergy, Rome, 1997
7. “Catechism of the Catholic Church”, Rome, 1993
8. “This Moment of Promise”, OCCB, 1989
9. “Fulfilling the Promise” The Challenge of Leadership”, OCCB, 1993
10. “Witness to Faith – The Expectations of Catholic School Board Trustees and Educators”, OCSTA, 1997