

The Catholic Civil Rights League

www.ccrl.ca

Quarterly highlights, September, 2010

Parental rights issues in education highlighted

As students return to school in the coming weeks, several ongoing situations pose challenges for the rights of parents in education, and the Catholic nature of publicly-funded Catholic schools.

In British Columbia, an agreement in 2006 between the B.C. Ministry of Education and two homosexual activists, Murray Corren and the late Peter Corren, requires boards to make curriculum materials as “gay friendly” as possible. It also created a new social justice option for Grade 12 that includes “non-heterosexual realities.”

The League asked all public school boards if and how they will accommodate the wishes of parents and students who object to curriculum demands for reasons of conscience and religion, or who wish their children to receive the information in an alternative format, up to and including removal from class. In response, boards educating a majority of public school students have said they will honour requests for accommodation based on freedom of conscience and religion. The League plans to revisit this with the school districts this Fall.

In Quebec, Catholic and other parents opposed to the new, mandatory program in ethics and religious culture (ECR) have launched court cases aiming to give parents a choice in religious education. Until the course was launched in 2008, parents chose between Catholic, Protestant or non-religious moral instruction, with over three quarters choosing the Catholic option. Last Spring, the League honoured Suzanne LaVallee of Drummondville, Quebec for her and her family’s role in spearheading the court challenge by parents who had requested but been denied exemptions from the new program. They have now applied for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court with the support of many Catholic organizations, including the League.

In a separate case brought by Loyola High School, which

sought to cover the ECR course material in a Catholic context, Judge Gerard Dugre ruled that the imposition of the course on a private school was “acting in a totalitarian fashion.” However, the government intends to appeal, despite polls showing that a majority of parents support choice in the religious education of their children.

In Ontario, two separate but not unrelated issues brought the rights of parents, particularly Catholic parents, into the spotlight earlier in the year. In March, Premier McGuinty announced that changes to the sex education component of the province’s health and family life curriculum – some of which would have included discussion of sexual intimacy and “gender identity” as early as Grade 2 – would apply equally in public and separate schools. Catholic educators asserted that any changes would be adapted to reflect Catholic teaching and be made part of the “Fully Alive” program. (The changes were withdrawn after parental backlash.)

Later, some parents and teachers expressed concerns about the province’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which is being implemented in all Ontario school boards over several years. Much of the policy is positive, reflecting an emphasis on the equality of all people and the need to treat everyone fairly, expressed through the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination (race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or disability).

However, questions were raised about some components. Many asked how same sex marriage, for example, could be presented as equal to traditional marriage in the setting of a Catholic school, or whether any faith-based school would be able to justify limiting hiring to members of its own creed.

On the latter point, there is case law supporting the rights

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of Catholic schools to insist on proof of Catholicism in the hiring of teachers. The rights of Ontario's Catholic schools are constitutionally guaranteed. As such, the right to adapt any new course material for use in a Catholic school should not be in question.

The League has spoken to officials at most Catholic education organizations, including the Institute for Catholic Education and the Toronto Catholic School Board, about these concerns. All have insisted, both with us and in their public statements, that the Catholic nature of our schools is important to them and will be preserved.

The crux of the matter, and perhaps the proverbial elephant in the room, is that most parents take little or no interest in general school matters that they perceive as unrelated to their own children. Ontario's Education Act states that parents can remove children from classes to which they have religious or conscientious objections, but there aren't many requests. Declining voter turnout has been a concern in all elections for several decades, but it is truly abysmal in elections for school board trustees; in Ontario's Catholic boards, over half of trustees were acclaimed in the 2003 elections.

Greater involvement in choosing who helps operate our schools, and some effort to get involved at the local level, are the real answers to upholding parental authority in education. Provincial and national organizations are helpful, but they can't take on roles that properly belong to parents themselves.

Better knowledge of lack of abortion law needed, says League

The Catholic Civil Rights League commented August 4 on a new survey showing that as many as two-thirds of Canadians do not know that Canada has no abortion law.

The Angus Reid poll, which asked 1,022 Canadian adults a variety of questions about their views on abortion, including their understanding of the country's law, found that just 22 per cent of them correctly identified the legal void that permits the procedure throughout pregnancy, with no government restrictions. Forty one per cent believe that the government regulates the procedure, only allowing it through the third month of pregnancy.

"It's quite possible so many believe we have an abortion law, and that there are more restrictions after the first trimester, since that is the case in almost all the western world," said League Executive Director Joanne McGarry.

"It may well be that a majority would support such a law, or that it is more difficult to find medical practitioners willing to do abortions as a pregnancy progresses. However, that is not what the law says, and it's difficult to have meaningful debate about any issue when people do not know the factual situation."

The League is a long-time supporter of the national March for Life and other educational initiatives in support of respect for life from conception to natural death. We were also involved in the bubble zone case in B.C., and have provided support for similar cases elsewhere, in support of the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion raised by the question of peaceful protest.

All abortion-related events provoke heated response from both pro-life and pro-abortion groups, particularly in the media. Abortion continues to be a moral and religious issue that most people consider serious. This poll suggests that it is also an issue where many are uninformed, underlining the importance of further education.

- Visit our website www.ccrl.ca for more articles and press releases about the League's work.

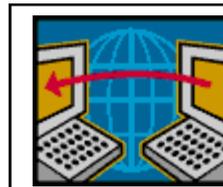
We need your expertise

We are currently seeking volunteers to fill upcoming board vacancies in western Canada and Ontario. If you are a member of the League with expertise in business, finance, education or the media, and can commit some time to our apostolate, please contact us.

Chapter contacts

For upcoming meetings of our Windsor-Essex chapter contact Bob Baksi at robert@baksi.com. Antigonish chapter meets the first Tuesday of each month and is active in media and public school issues. For more information, contact Don MacLellan at maclellan_donald@yahoo.ca.

To inquire about forming a chapter in your area, contact Joanne at 416-466-8244 or ccrl@ccrl.ca.



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League congratulates Cardinal Ouellet

The League sent a message of congratulation to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, archbishop of Quebec City, on his appointment as Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Commission for Latin America.

“The League has always appreciated Cardinal Ouellet’s support for expressing the teachings of the Church in the public forum,” said Philip Horgan, president of CCRL. “Despite criticism for upholding the Catholic vision of respect for life from conception to natural death, the cardinal has continued to be an inspiring leader for Catholics within Canada, and a staunch supporter for Catholic education within his home province. We send our prayers and warmest best wishes on this happy occasion.”

Pope Benedict appointed Cardinal Ouellet to his new posting June 29. Cardinal Ouellet is at present Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada, and was Apostolic Administrator of the archdiocese until he took possession of his new ecclesiastical office in Rome in August.

Media Watch

Vatican document attacked

In mid-July, the Vatican recently released updated guidelines on the handling of numerous issues in Church governance, including improvements to the management of allegations of the sexual abuse of minors. Because the wide-ranging document discussed the integrity of the sacraments, it also reiterated the penalties and sanctions for the attempted ordination of women. Links to the complete document, and some good articles about it, are available through the Media Watch section of our website.

While some twinning of the two topics in the public mind is understandable, given their appearance in a single document, some of the media lost no time in helping to create the impression that the Church considers sexual abuse and the ordination of women to be of equal gravity in a general sense, rather than in the strictly-defined sense of sacramental integrity. We are presently supporting several members’ complaints to the CBC about some regional coverage July 16 that included no spokesperson who supported Church teaching on the topic of ordination. We also contacted Radio 102.1 in Toronto to protest some obscene language about the Pope concerning this news story. Joanne McGarry, League executive director, was featured July 20 on CHCH News channel in discussion with Marie Bouclin, who considers herself an ordained Catholic priest.

Newspaper photo challenged

The League wrote Aug. 23 to the Ottawa Sun and the regional 24 Hour newspaper to protest the use of a photograph satirizing the Last Supper. The picture, part of a fundraising calendar created by a local “gay-friendly” rugby team, features semi-nude team members arranged around a dining table in seating arrangement almost identical to that of the famous Da Vinci painting. While acknowledging that the photo was created by the team, not the newspaper, the League pointed out that the choice was likely to offend most readers. The co-opting of very familiar religious images for commercial or satirical purposes is a common challenge, but this one was particularly insulting to believers. We expressed the hope that greater care would be exercised in future.

Pope, cardinal maligned with falsehoods

The departure to Rome of Cardinal Ouellet, former Primate of Canada and a good friend of the League, was marked by some good press reports (Post, Aug. 19, Register, Aug. 23) but also by some cynical observations about the sex abuse scandal and the need to revise the celibacy requirement for priests. In response, the League pointed out that all factual evidence suggests that celibacy is not a factor in sexual abuse, and that both the cardinal and the pope have pledged themselves to greater openness in addressing the problem. Our letter, *The Pope and sex abuse*, appeared in *The National Post*, August 25.

The Last Exorcism and ‘Hollywood theology’

“The Last Exorcism” opened Aug. 27 in most cities, and by all accounts misrepresents doctrine, practice and custom as only Hollywood can. Purporting to be the story of an “evangelical minister” who agrees to film his last exorcism as a documentary, the storyline soon mishmashes Catholic and evangelical Protestant beliefs on possession with some dramatic exorcism sequences that almost never occur in either tradition. This movie is definitely not to be taken seriously, and is unlikely to be entertaining unless you like horror movies.

Film festival seeks entries

The Real Life Film Festival/Festival du cinema c’est la vie (RLFF), which showcases films with moral themes suitable for the whole family, has launched its film submission period for next year’s festival. The event takes place in Sudbury, Ont. and is of particular interest to youth. For more information, visit the website www.sudburycinema.com.

Religion question belongs on census, says League

The League has called on Industry Minister Tony Clement to ask him to reconsider plans to make the longer form of the 2011 census voluntary, and urge him to retain the question about religious affiliation. The planned changes have also drawn the ire of statisticians, historians and other faith groups, who say the census will not be accurate enough to facilitate research and planning if crucial information is made voluntary.

“Information about religious affiliation and religious practice are helpful to many Canadians in their understanding of society and, more specifically for some faith groups, in planning for the needs of their community,” said Joanne McGarry, League executive director. “Such information is also extremely useful for historians and sociologists, both now and in the future, as well as to Canadians researching their own family histories.”

Unfortunately, Statscan’s choice appears to be reflective of a trend to keep matters of religion off the public radar. This is unfortunate, since some of the better research about the relationship between faith and philanthropy comes from the agency’s own research (E.g., Faith and volunteering.) The League hopes a compromise can be reached where the shorter census form retains questions about religion.

Victoria pro-life group funding restored

After two and a half months of consultation, the legal conflict between the University of Victoria’s pro-life club, Youth Protecting Youth (YPY), and the University of Victoria Students’ Society (UVSS) came to a conclusion July 20. The legal conflict was the result of two years of discrimination and censorship, during which YPY was repeatedly denied funding that other clubs received. The

situation escalated in the spring of 2010, when the UVSS refused to recognize YPY as a club, and made policy modifications that specifically targeted pro-life advocacy. YPY responded by filing a petition in the BC Supreme Court. The students’ society board of directors has now passed a motion to reinstate Youth Protecting Youth’s funding retroactively to 2008, a total of \$719.

Keep G-8 initiative pro-life, says League

The League has written to Prime Minister Stephen Harper to thank him for his clarification Sept. 3 that Canada’s contribution to the G-8 maternal health initiative would not include support for abortion. Along with many of our supporters, we had contacted his office earlier in light of remarks made by International Affairs Minister Bev Oda, who told the Ottawa Citizen that Canada might assist with abortions in countries where it is legal. (Complete article, Ottawa Citizen, Sept. 2, available through links on our website.) As an organization we were pleased when this divisive and destructive procedure was formally excluded from the initiative after the parliamentary vote in April. We were naturally concerned when a cabinet minister made statements that appeared to conflict with this pledge. The Prime Minister’s Office told the League Sept. 3 that Canada’s position has not changed.

League Annual General Meeting Toronto, Thurs., Oct. 21

**Mass: 5:30, St. Michael’s Cathedral
Meeting immediately afterward at Bond
Place Hotel, 65 Dundas St. East**

**Guest speaker: Charles Lewis, religion
editor, National Post**

Support the League

We rely completely on your generosity to continue our work. Gifts can be made online (ccrl.ca) or by mail to CCRL, 500 – 120 Eglinton Ave. E., Toronto, ON M4P 1E2., using this convenient form:

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