



December 12, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the diocese of St Paul,

During the past week in the media of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, there has been some pretty intense commentary about and misunderstanding of the views of the Catholic Bishops of Alberta, the Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta and the Alberta Catholic Schools Trustees Association as individuals and groups reacted to Premier Prentice's decision to "pause" before the third reading of Bill 10.

This bill is a legislative attempt to promote safe, caring and inclusive communities in schools. In it students experiencing same-sex attraction were singled out for special attention and care. In doing this, the bill attempts to reconcile the right of all students to be safe with the rights of parents and schools pertaining to the education and formation of their children. But the bill proposes doing this without mandating or ordering what are called Gay Straight Alliances in all schools.

That the premier and government were proposing this has been blamed on the bishops and that Gay Straight Alliances were not being mandated was due to "the roadblock (of) institutionalized religion and bishops" according to some media comments.

This letter and similar ones in other dioceses intends to simply recall and summarize our Catholic position.

1. First of all, it is true that we fully support the government's praiseworthy goal of promoting safe environments in schools and of therefore eliminating bullying of all kinds.
2. Also Catholic schools insist that the approach to protecting children be fully inclusive and that therefore no child be bullied for reasons of race, religion, body image, sexual orientation or social status. It is not true that we disregard or ignore the protection of any child.
3. In Catholic schools all aspects of school life must be permeated by and expressive of our faith.
4. The exercise of this right requires the freedom to determine both the name and the content of our educational initiatives in accordance with our faith.
5. Our faith teaches that while we respect persons of same sex orientation and protect them from bullying, we can and do achieve this without mandating Gay Straight Alliances in our schools.

In other words, we all agree about confronting and eliminating all bullying in school but we Catholics want to be able to continue doing so without having imposed upon us a particular program that addresses only one type of bullying anyway.

Therefore if and when you come to discuss this issue, I hope this information will prove helpful.

Sincerely in our Lord,

†Bishop Paul Terrio
Bishop of St Paul