

Office of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

My Dear Brothers and Sisters

The Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock said: "A half truth, like half a brick, is always more forcible as an argument than a whole one. It carries further."

During the past week, we have witnessed considerable misinformation and misrepresentation of the views of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association, the Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta and the Alberta Bishops in the public forum as individual and groups reacted to Premier Prentice's decision to "pause" before the third reading of Bill 10.

In my opinion, Bill 10 was a win-win for everyone. It enshrined parental rights, recognized the autonomy of local school boards, and student rights re diversity clubs without mandating Gay Straight Alliances.

However, for a variety of reasons things started to go sideways, and it has been widely trumpeted that "the roadblock is institutionalized religion and bishops." At best - and this deserves to be emphasized - this is a stereotypical half truth.

The mandating of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) is problematic for a number of reasons. It infringes parental authority over their children, the freedom to instruct one's children in a manner consistent with their faith, and citizens rights to manifest their religious beliefs by worship and practice in the absence of coercion or constraint by government.

A number of recent studies have identified groups of students who are most often bullied. The Toronto District School Board Research Report reported that students most frequently face bullying attacks based on their physical appearance (38%), their grades or marks (17%) their cultural background (11%) or their gender (6%). It is imperative that we address the root issue - bullying.

In the eyes of the Catholic Church, every human person is unique and irreplaceable gift created by our loving God and called to be his son or daughter. Created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, every person possesses an intrinsic dignity that must be respected. The Catechism of the Catholic church affirms that persons with same sex attractions "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives." (2358)

We believe and support:

that parents are the primary educators in any student's life;

Office of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

the sacredness of the individual;

that although sexuality is an important part of one's identity, it is only one part of an identity;

the promotion of justice;

the creation of a safe and caring school environment;

the establishment of holistic student groups dedicated to the inclusive nature of our schools which serve to promote safe and caring communities;

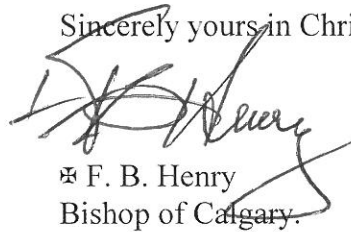
that are sensitive to the safety of those students who are at risk;

reflect through name and action the philosophy and theology of communion and emphasize inclusion, hospitality, respect and justice;

and open to discussion of a variety of issues, including bullying, justice, respectful relationships and language, and human sexuality issues.

In fact, we already have in place policies, protocols and resources supporting inclusive communities.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. B. Henry', written over a printed name and title.

✠ F. B. Henry
Bishop of Calgary.