

Catholic Dimension - Legally Speaking – Spring 2001

Kevin P. Feehan
Dentons Canada LLP

What Makes a Catholic School Catholic?

It is easy to take for granted that we have Catholic School Boards in Alberta, that we elect Catholic Trustees to those Boards and that they operate Catholic schools to be attended by our children. However, we often do not pause to ask the question: What makes our Catholic schools Catholic?

Why can't a Public School Board simply open a school and say that it is a Catholic school? Why can't a Public school simply open a classroom at the end of the hallway and call it a Catholic classroom? Why can't a joint Board of Trustees operate some schools which are called Catholic and some schools which are called Public?

In 2000, we had the rare opportunity to explore these questions in the context of exploring Francophone governance, 4 x 4 expansion and joint facilities issues in Alberta. We also had the rare opportunity to have legal affidavits sworn, directly addressing these questions by His Grace Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Edmonton, and His Excellency Frederick Henry, Bishop of Calgary.

Archbishop Collins, in his affidavit, referenced the teachings of Vatican II, the Code of Canon Law, publications of the Congregation for Catholic Education, an address by Pope John Paul II and an article by American Archbishop Pilarczyk entitled "*What is a Catholic School?*" and said the following which is set out in full:

1. After review of the above documents, I believe that there are some essential principles which describe a Catholic school, including but not limited to the following:

CHRIST - CENTRED

a)	a Catholic school must have Christ as the foundation of the whole enterprise;
b)	a Catholic school must be filled with constant references to the gospel and frequent encounters with Christ; and must be constantly inspired by the principles of the Second Vatican Council;
c)	a Catholic school must foster an environment that is illuminated by the light of faith and the living presence of Christ;
d)	a Catholic school must be centered upon developing a student's personal relationship with God through the person and teaching of Christ;

AN INSTRUMENT OF THE CHURCH

e)	a Catholic school is one in which Catholic education is established, directed, recognized or consented to, by the local Bishop or competent ecclesiastical authority;
f)	a Catholic school is one which is visited by, and in which Catholic education is watched over by,

	the local Bishop or competent ecclesiastical authority;
g)	a Catholic school is one in which all instruction and education is grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine, subject to the authority of the Catholic Church;
h)	a Catholic school must be a reflection of the Church in society, and a genuine and proper instrument of the Church;
i)	a Catholic school must be an instrument of the Church's evangelization, apostolate and pastoral action;
j)	a Catholic school is one in which the Church is present in the school and the school is present in the Church;
k)	a Catholic school must be filled with Catholic prayer, liturgy and preparation for the sacraments;

TOTAL INDIVIDUAL

l)	a Catholic school must strive to develop the total and integral formation of the individual in the image of Christ;
m)	a Catholic school must strive for the whole and complete Christian formation of its pupils and give special attention to those who are weakest;

SYNTHESIS, INTEGRATION AND BALANCE

n)	a Catholic school is one in which there is a goal of synthesis and integration of culture and faith, and synthesis and integration of faith and life;
o)	a Catholic school is one which demonstrates a unity in teaching, a common vision and a common outlook on life;
p)	a Catholic school is one in which "faith, culture and life are brought into harmony";
q)	a Catholic school is one which blends human culture with the message of salvation in a coordinated program integrating the "cultural, pedagogical, social, civil and political aspects of life";
r)	a Catholic school must be part of the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole and transmit a "coherent, comprehensive vision of life";
s)	a Catholic school must be a place of integral formation by a means of systematic and critical assimilation of culture and a place where there is a unity developed in the relationship between faith and culture;

COMMUNITY

t)	a Catholic school must form a community with the parents, recognizing that the parents are always the primary educators of their children;
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| u) | a Catholic school must exist as a community; a community of faith, a community which reflects family life and a meeting place of ecclesial experience; |
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PERMEATION

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| v) | a Catholic school is one in which religion and catechetics permeate every aspect of the school day and in which all school programming is implemented "within an overall religious perspective"; |
| w) | a Catholic school is one in which there is a systematic presentation of Catholic ethics in all aspects of the school and in particular in the areas of science and technology; and |
| x) | a Catholic school is one which transcends the "separation between time for learning and time for formation". |

Bishop Henry supplements Archbishop Collins' listing of the indicia of Catholic education by saying that a Catholic school must "offer instruction in the Catholic faith,... (and) participate in Catholic liturgical celebrations and sacraments in their schools without violation of Catholic faith principles". Bishop Henry also emphasizes that "in the Catholic Separate Schools in Alberta, there is a critical tripartite relationship between the parents, Catholic schools and the Catholic parish churches, each playing a vital role in the whole education of children in Catholic schools." He advises that the foundation for Catholic education is the existence of a separate "duly elected and accountable denominational school board" where "trustees are elected by majority vote of Catholic ratepayers in each separate school district" and where those Catholic school trustees "have the constitutional, statutory, moral and religious duty to preserve and enhance Catholic education for the benefit of all children attending Catholic schools."

It is the responsibility of every Catholic elector to ask the critical question: "What makes a Catholic school Catholic?" It is then the responsibility of every Catholic elector to review the structure, organization and delivery of education in their own jurisdiction and answer that question for themselves: are we providing a truly Catholic separate education to our children?