

CATHOLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES IN ALBERTA

Fundamental Principles, Process and Guidelines

To conform with Catholic teaching, a Catholic school has a distinct and unique culture and philosophy. It is defined and characterised as being Christ-centered, an instrument of the Church, focused on the development of the whole human person, committed to the inculcation of life and faith, and permeated in every aspect by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, a Catholic school is one in which God's presence, truth, and life permeate every aspect of the school.

While we, as trustees, have the responsibility to make decisions for our local communities, we also recognize our reciprocal responsibility to the greater Catholic community. As trustees dedicated to the education of our children, we cannot act independently of one another or of the Alberta Catholic Bishops when our Catholic faith binds us together on key issues.

In light of this teaching, and seeking to work co-operatively with our provincial government, we, the member boards of the ACSTA, together with our Alberta Catholic Bishops, identify the following Fundamental Principles as the foundation for building Catholic schools, in Alberta that allow full permeation of Christ's teachings.

Fundamental Principles

1. Free-standing Catholic schools on separate sites have a long and successful history in this province and remain the standard for Catholic educational facilities.
2. ACSTA and its member boards support community partnerships, provided they adhere to these Fundamental Principles.
3. The ACSTA and its member boards oppose the joint use of school buildings with public school boards in any manner that has the effect of undermining or interrupting the full permeation of Catholic values and beliefs.
4. No Catholic school board should be pressured into any type of partnership or joint-use arrangement that could restrict the board's ability to fulfill its mandate to provide quality Catholic Education to its students.
5. When a Catholic board wishes to establish a Catholic school, where none has previously existed, facilities must be arranged in adherence with the ACSTA Fundamental Principles. Arrangements would proceed with a commitment from the Minister responsible for a designated Catholic school when numbers warrant.
6. The ACSTA, its Board of Directors and member boards will not consider as precedent setting any pre-existing arrangement between a Catholic school and a public school that does not conform to these Fundamental Principles.

Process

1. Catholic school districts contemplating a facility other than a free-standing building shall seek and receive the support of the local bishop and ACSTA in writing, prior to beginning the project development.

Guidelines

The ACSTA strongly encourages member boards to be good stewards of the funding received to manage their operations as effectively as possible. The original intent of the Covenant created in 2003 was to address a specific situation in Alberta regarding the sharing of a single building with little separation. The notion of sharing has greatly expanded over time and the realization that there is some sharing that can be done in a manner that does not infringe on the rights of Catholic schools to fully permeate our Catholicity. Shared facilities also have expanded to include the sharing of facilities with community (municipal, provincial, community) organizations. These guidelines in no way subvert the original covenant but recognize and provide clarity to the fundamental principle on Shared Facilities as originally outlined in 2003.

- The norm is a free standing self-contained Catholic school where the Catholic identity and character is prominent and absolute.
- Catholic school constitutional rights must be fully and completely maintained.
- The autonomy and authority of the Catholic school trustees must be preserved.
- Catholic schools, divisions, and the ACSTA must be good stewards of the human, financial, and physical resources provided them.

The Catholic trustees and the Catholic Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories believe that Catholic education is a gift held in trust to us to ensure the evangelization and formation of our Christian communities. This gift can be best realized in communities (schools) fully permeated with the spirit, prayer, teachings, witnesses and symbols of our beliefs. A shared facility can jeopardize or weaken the ability of a school to accomplish the fullness of its mission by compromising its values, teachings, prayer or symbolic representation of faith.

➤ **Community Partnerships Defined**

Community partnerships can be defined in many ways: Public school divisions, recreational facilities, fine arts facilities, government (provincial/municipal/county) offices or resources, private industry, non-profits, etc. Each of these partnerships provides opportunities and drawbacks to sharing. Before entering into a sharing arrangement boards and administrations must ask the questions:

- Does this hinder the manner in which the ideals of Catholic education can be provided and sustained?
- Can this facility be built without sharing?
- What would be the benefits of sharing? Do they outweigh the costs?
- Would activities in the shared facility violate Catholic moral principles?
- Does this partnership foster or hamper the evangelization of its community? (Can I hang a crucifix on the wall?)

➤ **Community Partnerships with Other Catholic and Public Boards**

Partnerships can mean more than sharing physical space. There are many ways that the Catholic school community can benefit from partnerships that do not include actual sharing of a building. Where fiscally beneficial sharing among divisions with Catholic schools these could include:

- Purchasing cooperatives
- Curriculum development and resources
- Centralized computer services
- Waste management

- Capital construction design
- Professional development services and consultants
- Personnel for specialized courses
- O, H and S
- Technology Services/Web Consulting
- Payroll
- Courier services

This list is not exhaustive and Catholic school divisions should continue to explore areas and services where sharing can be achieved. Where no savings are gained or inefficiencies of time and level of services are lost the purpose and value of cooperating is lost as well.

Partnerships with public boards and Catholic boards can be beneficial and not inhibit the goal of Catholic education and could include:

- Transportation
- Software licensing
- Bulk Purchasing
- Courier services
- Sports leagues

➤ **Areas where Catholic school Boards cannot share with Public boards**

These activities should remain independent and driven by Catholic values and teachings:

- Administrators
- Setting district goals
- Superintendents
- Program/curriculum development in Religious education and permeation
- Certified staff
- Supervisions of instructional programs
- Teacher supervision and evaluation
- Daily operations of the schools
- Policies and procedures
- Philosophy and Goals
- Schools/classroom/instructional space

➤ **Sharing with Community Partners**

There are many successful occurrences of sharing with Community partners in Alberta already.

All communities but especially rural areas are being encouraged to create community centres and use the school as a hub to do this. Generally these are positive examples of shared facilities but some cautions must be put into place:

- When sharing a library with a community, does the school have the right to determine which books are acceptable for students to access or does the partner or community determine standards? This can work both ways; books not acceptable to Catholics and Catholic materials (the Catechism of the Catholic Church or a bible) may not be acceptable to all members of the community. Can the library/hallway/common areas be places to display material that represent the liturgical year?
- If a gymnasium, theatre or other recreation facility is shared, can a crucifix be hung in the gym? Can Mass be celebrated there? Can symbols of the faith be presented and left for any period of time? Can the school use this space for a weekend religious retreat? *ThinkFast?* Would the Catholic school have control in the plays that would be presented in the theatre? If the community theatre company chooses to perform a play that violates Catholic teaching or decency and this is connected to a Catholic school, would the presentation of this play be seen as endorsement of the values presented?

- If community, health or private offices are housed in a shared facility can Planned Parenthood, a pharmacy dispensing aborticides or a doctor who performs abortions be on the same premises that your share?

There is always the possibility of non-intended consequences that could come with sharing facilities; is there a plan in place to address these?

➤ **Process for Requesting approval of ACSTA and Bishops for Shared Facilities**

The spirit of the covenant is not the denial of sharing but to ensure that the sharing is in best interest of the Catholic community and the values of the church to which we belong as safeguarded by the Bishops. Unintended harm may flow from one division's desire for a school setting precedence to Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure that may put pressure on other districts to compromise as well.