



May 4, 2021

In response to numerous inquiries from trustees, teachers, students and parents, the Archdiocese of Toronto offers the following reflection regarding inclusivity and acceptance.

### **Reflection on Inclusivity & Acceptance from the Archdiocese of Toronto**

Earlier this year, Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, met with Directors of Education and Chairs of Catholic School Boards in the Archdiocese of Toronto. Among the items discussed were issues of inclusion, and specifically the request made in some boards to have Catholic schools fly the Pride flag during the month of June. We are well aware of the passionate feelings on both sides of this issue, and we pray that dialogue regarding these matters can be conducted respectfully and thoughtfully. It is painful that the public discussion around how to best promote inclusivity has, in itself, often caused division in the community.

As Catholics, we are taught that we must love our neighbour and treat every individual as a child of God, accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity.

Parents make a clear choice when they decide that their children will attend a Catholic school. They rightly expect that trustees, principals, teachers – all partners in education – will ensure that Catholic teaching is presented, lived and infused in all that we do.

In that regard, the appropriate symbol that represents our faith, and the inclusion and acceptance of others, is the cross, which is visible at the entrance of every Catholic school. It is the primary symbol of our Christian faith: it draws us to contemplate the generous and sacrificial love of Jesus, as he lays down his life for all of us. In a world that would crucify an innocent man, Jesus returns love for hatred and says: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) The love represented by the cross is that sacrificial love, centered not on self, but on others. The cross outside of Catholic schools and any Catholic church, hospital or institution, signals our commitment that all who enter the building are welcomed and loved in their beauty and uniqueness as children of God.

Practically, we also know that there are any number of groups working to advocate for many diverse causes. For this reason, many school boards wisely fly only the Canadian flag out of a sense of equity for all.

There is a belief among some that unless one embraces secular symbols, one cannot be inclusive or accepting. This is simply not true. Where there are cases of injustice and mistreatment of any student, whether they are bullied or rejected due to their sexual orientation, appearance, race, sex or any other reason, we must seize the moment, address the situation and ensure that we lead by example, as we foster a culture of care and love for every individual. That truth is perfectly represented in our most fundamental Catholic symbol: the cross.



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We also recognize that there are times when the presentation of Catholic teaching will clash with the views held by many in society, whether these relate to human sexuality, the sanctity of life, issues of social justice or other deeply held beliefs. Those who are faithful to these teachings are often ridiculed, mocked and excluded. Frequently, since the time of Jesus, Christian teaching has not aligned with currently prevailing opinions.

To be clear, locally elected Catholic school trustees will ultimately determine the path forward, but we trust that these insights will be helpful. We pray that we may all reflect on these challenging conversations and do so in a spirit of collaboration, mutual respect and care for one another.