

# Catholic teachers wade into controversy around moral expectations in contracts

Alberta Catholic teachers are speaking out after Education Minister David Eggen announced an investigation into whether so-called Catholicity – or morality – employment clauses are discriminatory.

The issue was sparked by a former principal who filed [two human rights complaints](#) against the Calgary Catholic School District, alleging she was pushed out due to discrimination on religious, marital, and sexual orientation grounds.

Since then, Catholicity clauses in teacher contracts have come under the media spotlight. The clauses vary from district to district, but list expectations such as attending weekly Mass and following and modelling a lifestyle in harmony the practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church. One tenet of the faith is that marriage is a sacramental union between a man and a woman.



Education Minister David Eggen

Eggen's office has now ordered a review of teacher contracts at all 17 Catholic school districts in Alberta.

His office said the minister was "deeply concerned to learn that any school board was making their employees sign a document that says it is not OK to be gay. He believes that it is simply not acceptable in today's Alberta. Our government firmly believes that LGBTQ rights are human rights we will not

condone discrimination against people on the basis of who they love.”

The issue of Catholicity clauses is so fraught that Catholic educators currently employed by Alberta school districts declined comment when contacted by Grandin Media. Nevertheless, others felt compelled to speak up.

“It is totally appropriate for Catholic schools to ask their teachers to live lifestyles that do not contradict the Catholic faith that the school is promoting,” Brett Fawcett, who has taught in both Catholic and public schools in Alberta, said in an [op-ed](#) for Grandin Media.

Fawcett cited a [1996 Supreme Court](#) case that stated that even Charter freedoms could be limited in the case of teachers, because the standard of behaviour that the job requires of them is higher than for the average citizen.



**Brett Fawcett**

“It seems natural that schools with a specific programming or focus might have additional requirements of their teachers to make sure their lives are not interfering with the mission of the school. Having taught at both Catholic and secular schools, my experience is that working at almost any school will require a level of having to accommodate yourself to that school’s mission.”

Eggen’s office encouraged any teachers who feel a Catholicity clause is being used to discriminate against them to contact the Alberta Teachers’ Association or the Human Rights Commission.

In a [statement](#), the ATA said it would vigorously defend teachers whose rights are denied.

Up to this point, “we have not been presented with a case related to these

Catholicity clauses where circumstances warranted escalating the matter to higher courts – by and large, satisfactory resolution is achieved on an individual case-by-case basis.”

In her complaint, Barb Hamilton – a longtime teacher and principal – alleges the Calgary school district discriminated against her by refusing to employ her on the grounds of marital status, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Hamilton claims that staff in Catholic schools suffer from a sense of fear and there is an unspoken “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach.

“I think we ought to look towards a bigger question,” said Hudson Byblow, a Catholic speaker who has taught in Alberta and Saskatchewan

At the same time, he’d rather see Catholicity clauses refocused on modelling Catholic virtues, rather than “behavioural expectations” as they are currently.



Hudson Byblow

“We all know that if a teacher doesn’t believe something or uphold a particular value, they will be less effective at living the joy of that belief and value, and thus less effective at passing it on to others,” said Byblow, who himself experienced [same-sex attraction](#) in his journey back to the Church.

“And let’s not kid ourselves, every teacher knows that their value set becomes revealed in their interactions with students, because students look to teachers for support and advice on things outside the curriculum, never mind what ideas a dissenting Catholic teacher might want to sprinkle in on their own.”

When contacted, Sandra Haltiner, president of the Edmonton Catholic local of the Alberta Teachers Association, referred to a statement by the ATA.

“Our policy calls upon Catholic boards, notwithstanding their special constitutional status, to refrain from hiring and employment practices that would be discriminatory,” the statement reads.

The ATA says it will defend and protect the rights of teachers, but it’s powerless to nullify existing contracts or to “force” school boards to delineate contract terms.

In spite of critics and an organized campaign against Catholic schools, Education Minister Eggen reiterated the NDP government’s support for publicly funded Catholic education.

“Our government supports Catholic education in Alberta. We have worked closely with Catholic boards to hire teachers, build schools, and support inclusive classrooms,” he said.

“We appreciate the contributions Catholic Albertans have made to our province and respect their constitutionally protected rights.”