

'We look to our teachers as examples of morality'

As I enter my last semester in Alberta's publicly funded Catholic schools, I am, more than ever, thankful for the Catholic education I have received.

Academically, Catholic schools are not so different than any secular school, but there are unique differences in the character of our schools, and they have shaped me into the person I am.

I realize the moments of my schooling I will remember most are uniquely tied to attending these schools. I can clearly remember receiving the sacraments. I am sure those same classmates can remember the excitement we as nine-year-olds had thinking of the most unanswerable existential questions for the priest who would visit our classroom.

In the second half of my Catholic education I realized much of what I will take away goes beyond religion class. Teachers practising the faith gave them a unique respect for the material they taught, and a few great teachers brought a general wonder to their subject.

I am thankful to be in one of Canada's three provinces which publicly fund Catholic education. The first Catholic school was opened in the Oblate mission of Lac Ste. Anne in the 1840s, and later in St Albert three Grey Nuns opened a school and orphanage in 1860, (this later became Alberta's first school district). Despite authentic Catholic education having been present in the province for 159 years, there have recently been different people lobbying against what is being taught in our schools.

Last month a former principal of a Catholic school in Calgary filed a human rights complaint against the school district, alleging she was forced to resign over a breach in her employment contract. This incident led Alberta's education minister, along with others, to question Catholic schools' ability to hold teachers to a morality clause.

Catholic schools have been in Alberta since before Alberta was a province, and they are not going to change whether or not they are in line with what others would deem acceptable in today's Alberta. As Catholic schools view the role of the teacher as a vocation, and not merely just another job, it is understandable where this conflicting view would come from.

Catholic employers have a right to hold their employees accountable for living out a Catholic lifestyle. It should be considered a given that Catholic institutions keep their institutions Catholic.

Whether students or staff realize it or not, we look to our teachers as

examples of morality. Between Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, parents choose to send almost one million children to publicly funded Catholic schools. Administrators have an obligation to continue to teach the way they have been teaching.

After listening to some people demean the decisions of our Catholic schools, it appeared that many of them thought no one in this province accepted true Catholic teaching

I realized how false this attitude was when I was reporting on the One Rock 2.0 conference for young adults in September. All four Alberta bishops actively mingled with young adults and they were easy to talk to. I think we all felt a fatherly presence from them that day, and later we had the opportunity to ask them questions on a panel.

During a panel discussion with Alberta's four bishops, one young woman asked what our dioceses were going to do to protect the faith being taught in our schools.

My bishop, Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton, answered: "We will simply continue to do what we do. No government can tell us not to be Catholic. And we will not accept any government telling us not to be Catholic."

I, and the 500 other young people in the room, answered with cheers and applause. I could not help but think of those people who seemed convinced that no one in Alberta wanted true Catholic education to continue as it has been for 159 years.

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