

No backing down on Canada Summer Jobs controversy

Neither the government nor parishes and charities opposed to the required pro-abortion Canada Summer Jobs attestation are backing down, leaving many scrambling to find alternative funding.

“We’re not seeking a war with the government or anything like that,” said Cardinal Thomas Collins of Toronto in a Feb. 23 interview in Rome with Vatican Radio.

“We didn’t start this controversy,” he said. “We’re trying to be cooperative, but we cannot check off the box” that says “I believe in abortion and a couple of other things, because we don’t believe it.”



Cardinal Thomas Collins of the Archdiocese of Toronto

“No citizen should be asked to pass a faith test or an ideology test,” the Cardinal said, noting the government “seems to be doubling down.”

“We don’t want to get into a dispute, so we’re trying to give them a way out,” he said, adding the groups would follow the laws of Canada. “If they still refuse us, we’ll have to find a way” of funding the programs such as summer camps for disadvantaged children.

In the Toronto archdiocese alone, the shortfall could be more than half a million dollars, according to communications director Neil McCarthy.

McCarthy said parishes and groups in the diocese had followed the lead of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (CCCC) that had suggested to groups that had received letters giving them ten days to sign the attestation to send another letter requesting accommodation under the Charter on religious freedom, conscience rights and other grounds.

"We are waiting to see what the government response will be," said McCarthy. "There is also a need for us to begin looking at contingency plans should these applications be rejected. For parishes alone in the Archdiocese of Toronto, we are talking about a financial shortfall of \$500,000-\$600,000."

This will likely be a special collection, though nothing is "firmed up yet," McCarthy said. "There may be some communities that can absorb the hit but clearly many can't."

The Bishop Ronald Fabbro of London, Ont. instructed his diocese not to apply for the Canada Summer Jobs grant under the new rules. Other dioceses had urged parishes to apply, but to send in a hard copy of the application with part of the attestation struck out, or with an attestation supplied by the diocese.

"I believe that we need to take a stand against the position of the government of Canada and say that we will not be bullied into even the appearance of collusion on this issue," said Bishop Fabbro, who then set up a special collection to raise the \$40,000 to replace what the diocese would have ordinarily received from the summer jobs program to hire students to run summer camps.

"The response has been tremendous," said Nelson Couto, communications officer for Diocese of London. "People have appreciated the bishop has made a stand. Many people have written and phoned to lend their support."

The diocese began a collection in parishes the third week of February. "Already we have received many generous donations," Couto said. "People are identifying with the bishop's position."

"We hold that these programs are important for our young people and we don't believe they should suffer as a result of conditions required by the stand the government has taken."

"There's a lot of excitement," Couto said. "A lot of people have expressed their pride in their bishop."

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) had also advised its members to follow the CCCC's suggested protocol in requesting accommodation under the Charter.

"We've heard from many who have done this," said Julia Beazley, the EFC's director of public policy.

"Yesterday, we were forwarded the first example of how Service Canada is responding to these requests, which is to state: 'Unfortunately, as the attestation has been altered, we remain unable to assess project number *****,'" Beazley said. "There was no acknowledgement in the response of the request for accommodation."

"This is just one example so far, but the previous responses from Service Canada seem to be fairly standardized. I anticipate this one will be as well."

Barry Bussey, the CCCC's director of legal affairs, said some of their members have received similar form letters.

"The government is simply not backing down on this," Bussey said.

Deacon Jeff Lebane said Divine Infant Parish in the Archdiocese of Ottawa applied at first using an alternate attestation suggested by the archdiocese. When that application was refused, they sent out a letter "asking them for consideration" because "we have a fundamental right to this under the charter."

Divine Infant Parish has hired one summer student a year for the past 13 years, Lebane said. "We helped many who were in real financial need, who needed this money to pursue post-secondary education."

Lebane said they are waiting to hear back from the government.