



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES MEMORANDUM

APS033

Guidelines for School Parish Relations

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Memo To: Principals; Vice Principals; Planning and Priorities; Chaplains; Clergy; Consultants

From: Director of Education

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Administrative Memorandum is to outline the guidelines for school-parish relations.

REFERENCES

- Board Policy I 001 Sharing Our Journey
- Beliefs: Our community, together with the church and the home, proclaim and teach the gospel through our Catholic educational ministry.
- Guiding Principles: *Collaboration* - Collaboration is working together in a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation for the common good. It empowers all members to contribute their unique gifts. In a Catholic educational community, collaboration involves both personal growth within a larger faith community and engagement in our communal journey towards a just and loving society.

COMMENTS AND GUIDELINES

1. During the 2000-2001 school year the Director of Education and Spiritual Animator met with representatives of the Cambridge and Waterloo Deaneries to examine school-parish relations. The guidelines attached to this memorandum result from our discussions.
2. The attached guidelines constitute the processes for our school system with respect to school-parish relations.
3. A copy of the guidelines has been forwarded to the Episcopal Vicar for Education for the Diocese of Hamilton.

REVIEW PROCESS

These guidelines will be reviewed during the 2009-2010 school year.

Guidelines for School-Parish Relations

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL-PARISH RELATIONSHIPS

A joint project of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board and the Deaneries of the Region of Waterloo.



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Spiritual Animator,
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LEARNING • GROWING • TRANSFORMING THE WORLD TOGETHER

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Note: A number of the points below have been taken from the document:

Building Bridges Between The School ... The Church at Study and The Parish ...
The Church at Prayer and Worship – “Some Thoughts and Suggestions for
Consideration” – Parish – School Liaison,
The Archdiocese of Toronto, 1990.

Below the document will be referenced as Building Bridges.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL-PARISH RELATIONSHIPS

OPENING REFLECTIONS

***“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.
Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of
God as a little child will never enter it.”***

Mark 10:14-16

- All of us who work in school systems and parishes are members of the same Church; this is a reality we can never forget. The school can be pictured powerfully as the Church at study and the parish powerfully as the Church at worship and prayer but we are all members of the same Body of Christ. We are Christ’s light to one another and hence are called to act accordingly.
- Our schools are called to build bridges and links with the parishes in our region.
- The parish community is the basic faith community in our Church and society. Our present bishop is rightly very strong on this. It is the parish that has responsibility ultimately for the sacramental life of our students and staffs.
- As educators we need to realize that the support of the whole Catholic community is necessary to ensure that our schools’ mission is carried out. This is more true today than it ever has been.

PRACTICAL THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- The relationship of the school(s) with the parish is a two-way street. It is a good idea for the pastor and parish team to spend a bit of time every year with the school staff (a time that includes praying together); leadership for this initiative does not need to come from the parish but it can be taken by the school community.
- We exist in a society that is very pluralistic and individualistic and materialistic. Faced with this reality, all groups in the Church need to cooperate therefore and to reinforce what each is doing. It is enlightening to remember that today adults in the Church have more in common with each other (whether they are liberal or conservative) than with the young. A certain shared experience of Church (that adults have had) is breaking down; today's youth have a quite different experience of Church than the experience of (older) adults. Youth today do not share the religious language, conversation and understanding that older adults have had. So for youth Catholic literacy is breaking down and they do not understand Catholicism from the inside. Thus all the more reason that all groups in the Church that carry on religious formation should pull together. If we can all be convinced of this, we can do great things for the Lord and we will be able to convince our youth regarding the goodness and beauty of our Catholicism ("convinced people convince others," as Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston has said in another context!).
- We must always be aware that cooperation between the schools and other segments of the Catholic Faith Community, including the parish, is for the sake of the youth and children we are privileged to serve.
- Many parents today no longer express their Faith in terms of a community gathered for Eucharist (parish); here is where schools can really help by trying to instill in children a need to belong to a parish community.
- The traditional triad in Catholic religious formation of children and youth, the home, the school, and the parish, makes good sense as an ideal because it maximizes the Christian formation of children and youth. Schools make all kinds of efforts to communicate with parents; in the triad (or tripod) framework, schools are called to do the same with the parish communities.
- If schools can communicate reasonably well with parishes, conflicts can be avoided.
- Where appropriate, the sending out of joint school-parish letters to parents is a commendable practice.
- "Good working relationships [between school and parish] require that responsibilities be delineated" (Building Bridges). Often priests and parish pastoral ministers are not clear regarding their role in the school (outside of celebrations of the Eucharist and sacraments); this kind of situation easily generates conflict. The solution is to sit down with priests and parish staff in order to delineate responsibilities.
- One of the big gifts the school communities can make to the priests and parish staff is to help them better understand youth and children.

- Catechesis for the reception of sacraments is ultimately the responsibility of the local pastor but hopefully the school can be a powerful help here. In this area, cooperation has to be worked out in the particulars. The decision as to who receives a sacrament is made by the pastor and parish team and the parents in consultation with the school.

Communication Guidelines

It takes two individuals or groups to engage in and sustain a relationship. And like all relationships, the school-parish connection will, from time to time, experience strain and perhaps at its worst extreme a breakdown. Clear communication guidelines and adherence to the process will mitigate the majority of issues and help to sustain and enhance a positive relationship. And it is understood that where there is communication between individuals or groups over a concern:

- serious complaints must be in writing providing the relevant information including the names of individuals who have brought the concern to your attention so as to avoid dealing with situations that are only based on unsubstantiated allegations, innuendo or rumor. Always act out of Christian charity.
- where a complaint involves one's statutory duty to report cases of abuse, the complainant will forgo these communication guidelines and exercise his/her statutory duty and report the abuse forthwith to the appropriate agency.
- ***It is our collective expectation that the communication guidelines will be used by both school and parish personnel.***

Step One: Speak to the person with whom you have the concern (e.g., principal/pastor/teacher)

In the majority of cases the issue will be resolved. If not, proceed to step two...

Step Two: Speak to the Spiritual Animator (Fred Scinto, CR)

Father Fred will speak to both individuals/groups to resolve the issue. Father Fred may involve system, community and diocesan resources to assist.

If Father Fred is unable to resolve the issue, the process will proceed to step three...

Step Three: The Spiritual Animator will prepare a report outlining the issues and the steps taken to resolve the concern. Copies of the report will be provided to the complainants, the Director of Education and the Bishop of the diocese through the Episcopal Vicar for Education.

The Director of Education and Bishop of the diocese will use their respective staff procedures to resolve the issue.

PRACTICAL THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE

At the Level of the School

- Schools can be really welcoming to the pastor and the parish team. One very practical suggestion here is to have the school community put on some kind of celebration when a new pastor is appointed to the parish.
- Students should be made familiar enough with the local parish church. Having some of the school Masses in the parish church is a good idea.
- The school can invite the pastor and the parish team to take part in various school activities. Inviting the pastor and parish team to come to school activities even though they might not be able to come is a good idea because it builds up rapport. The school can also take the initiative in arranging for two – three formal or informal meetings with the pastor and parish team throughout the year.
- Early in the school year the pastor can be invited to address the staff (briefly) in order to outline parish policies that may impact on the school.
- Schools can also solicit feedback on occasion from pastors and parish teams as to how they are doing.
- Parish bulletins can become a link between school and parish. For example, the school can ask the parish to place certain school items in parish bulletins. Or schools can ask parishes for parish bulletins to be distributed to senior students in grade school.
- The parish representative on the school council could act as a liaison between school and parish.
- The pastor and/or parish representative should be an integral part of the school graduation planning committee.
- A school principal can always take the initiative and ask the pastor if he/she can address the parish team or the parish council (where there is one).
- Where a problem arises involving the pastor and/or a member of the parish pastoral team and the problem comes to the attention of the principal (or someone else at the school), all things being equal, it is best for the principal to call the pastor (or other parish team member) directly and speak to them about it. Nothing of this nature should be managed in an indirect round-about way that leaves the parish person out of the loop.

PRACTICAL THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE
At the Level of the Parish

- Providing information/inserts for the school newsletter.
- Have a parish/school liaison person or persons in place.
- Ensure there is parish representation on the local Catholic School Council of the schools within the parish's boundary.
- Invite schools to celebrate Eucharist in the parish church at least 2 times per year per school.
- Highlight – at least once per year - each local school served by the parish as Sunday Eucharist
- Have parish teams invite school staff to parish events.
- Engage in occasional fellowship and gatherings between parish and school staff.
- Collaborate with the school in a parish/school reflection day for school staff.

Avoiding Conflict Regarding the School's Religion Curricula

- The school can avoid a great deal of conflict if it is proactive. Very early in the school year the pastor and parish team can be called into a joint meeting with the school's administration (and anyone else who would be appropriate). Give the pastor and parish team a complete copy of the religious curricula (copies are available for signing out from the Media Centre for periods of time and the board may purchase copies for parishes within available resources) and invite them to come into the classroom. Ask them to work together for the good of the children. Before the priest or parish team member comes into a classroom, it would be good for the teacher to phone this person to inform him/her what topics have been covered since the last visit and what topics need to be reinforced.
- At this meeting at the start of the school year, the administration should gently remind the pastor and parish team that the teachers of religion are trained to teach religion but they are not theologians; hence they do not know how to handle differences between the school program and what the priest or parish staff member may say if he/she does not follow closely the school program on their visit. For the sake of the children and their welfare, such teacher frustration needs to be avoided.

- A written plan of the pastor and parish team's involvement not only in Religious Education classes but also in the overall context of the school's operation should be developed collaboratively on an annual basis by the pastor and principal.
- The above procedure is much better than waiting for a difference to arise and then trying to address it!

The Catechism of The Catholic Church

- Sometimes overzealous priests or parish team members or parishioners-parents want this new catechism to be used (directly) in the school's religion program. To handle this situation, keep the following in mind.
- The catechism is a "reference text ... a point of reference for the catechisms and compendiums that are prepared in various regions ... a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine ... This catechism is not intended to replace the local catechisms duly approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, the diocesan Bishops and the Episcopal Conferences ... It is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms." These comments are taken from the apostolic constitution Fidei depositum written by Pope John Paul II on the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. ["catechism" in this context does not mean the question-and-answer format with which some of us grew up; it means rather an extended exposition of the Catholic Faith.]
- The catechism itself tells us that "this work [The Catechism of the Catholic Church] is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis" (#12).
- Pope John Paul in his 1993 address to the American bishops of the Midwest saw this catechism as a basic text for universities, colleges, and the upper grades of Catholic high schools [but not below these levels].
- The "Informative Dossier" issued by the Editorial Commission of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 1992 stated that "the catechism is not intended for direct use by young adults, youths, and children."
- Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1993 stated that "it was clear from the start that this [The Catechism of the Catholic Church] could not be a catechismus minor, a manual to be used directly in parish or school-based catechesis."
- The Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1993 stated that the Catechism is to be implemented "as a reference but not as a pastoral instrument [in terms of direct use in a teaching context]."

- “It should be clear that this work [the Catechism] cannot appropriately be placed in the hands of children in Catholic schools and religious education classes around the world as a textbook: it was not designed for that purpose” (Archbishop William J. Levada, Portland, Oregon).
- The Catechism “is not a curriculum text” (Brian McGowan of OECTA’s Professional Development Department).
- “We would emphasize that the publication of the catechism does not in any way negate the validity of the programs currently in use in our schools ... The new Catechism is certainly not intended for direct use in the schools. It is a reference work. It is possible to envisage situations in which older students might occasionally use it for reference in advanced studies, but it is simply not written in a manner that would make it accessible to younger children.” (Bishop James L. Doyle in a 1994 letter on behalf of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops)
- And finally in all this do keep in mind what the Catechism says in #25, viz., “the whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends.” Charity above all!

At the Level of the Board

- The Board can always solicit feedback from pastors and parish teams as to how it is doing. This kind of solicitation has the benefit of bringing pastors and parish teams on side.
- At least once per school year, the school board will offer an opportunity for pastors and parish teams to receive in-service on the Religious Education and Family Life Programs – both of which follow the guidelines/programs established by the Canadian and/or Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations.
- A good move would be for the Board to ensure that parishes are familiar with any guidelines the Board has for chaplains and for school pastoral teams.
- The Board should make sure that it values and validates the (new) pastoral reference.
- The Board can ask the deans what they need from the Board regarding curricula, policy, guidelines, basic documents, etc.
- The Director and the Spiritual Animator should continue attending meetings of the Waterloo Deanery. It would be a step in the right direction if they could also attend the Cambridge Deanery meetings on occasion. Joint deanery meetings should also be encouraged.

- Meeting with the Bishop (and the diocesan Vicar of Education) once or twice a year would be good on the part of the Director, the Spiritual Animator, and anyone else the Director thinks would be appropriate.
- The Board could send a letter of welcome to new priests informing them of the names of the schools and their principals in the parish area.
- A (simple) annual celebration hosted by the Board for pastors and parish teams would garner a lot of good will.

CONCLUSION

- “As we accept this task, let us take courage in the thought that we are asked only to do the sowing; the harvest is in the hands of God. Genuine and heroic must our endeavour continue to be, remembering that today, as in apostolic times, if [Saint] Paul plants and Apollo waters, it is God who gives the growth.” (Building Bridges)