

JUST IN TIME

News from the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) Committee

*Faith can move mountains,
Darling, you will see I can move mountains
If you have faith in me.*

—Nat King Cole

Faith is a word that is often bandied about with abandon, but what does it really mean? For Nat King Cole, faith is about love and trust, and he uses it in the context of romantic love. But faith has been around a lot longer than Nat—Saint Faith (Sainte Foy in French; Santa Fe in Spanish) is said to have been a young Christian woman from Aquitaine who was arrested by the Romans sometime around 290 CE. She reportedly refused to make pagan sacrifices and was tortured to death with a red-hot brazier. And Faith, along with her sisters Hope and Charity, was a martyred Christian.

For the 19th-century American poet and ardent abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, faith is the *sine qua non* of a person's existence. To wit:

When faith is lost, when honor dies
The man is dead!

Religion—What's It About?

The following is an excerpt from Safe and Caring Schools for Students of All Faiths, a joint publication of the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities and the Edmonton Interfaith Society for Education and Action. The goal of the publication is to provide teachers with helpful tips for dealing with religion and questions of faith in the classroom. The entire booklet can be downloaded at no charge from www.sacsc.ca/Resources_School.htm#booklets.

Historically, religion has been a powerful force in shaping both religious and secular societies. It has

Faith often comes into conflict with science. The quirky and brilliant and sometimes subversive poet Emily Dickinson nicely sums up this tension (sometimes delicate, sometimes violent) in an 1860 poem:

Faith is a fine invention
For gentlemen who see—
But microscopes are prudent
In an emergency.

Whatever you might think of faith, whether you have it or don't, whether you use it to cheer on your favourite hockey team in the race for Lord Stanley's Cup or whether you use it just to cheer on the Lord, you cannot deny that it is a powerful force, and as such, our kids need to know a little bit about it.

To this end, then, this edition of *Just in Time* tackles the sometimes thorny topic of faith and its place in public education.

shaped important institutions, influenced laws and provided guidance for principled living in virtually all cultures. There is archaeological evidence of religious beliefs and practices from the dawn of civilization. Early people created artifacts such as fertility goddesses, painted caves to ensure successful hunting and buried their dead in ways that indicate a belief in life after death. From the beginning, humans have believed that divine and inexplicable forces are responsible for the cycles of nature, the complexities of creation and the mystery of death.

Knowing more about religion in general is a good place to begin to help students understand how religion can be an enriching, positive influence rather than one that causes people to focus on differences. Problems and misunderstandings can be resolved when students understand that all religions have unique expressions of faith, most evident in outward appearances and different customs and rituals. ...

The ultimate aim of each religion is the same—to help people live meaningful and fulfilling lives. All religions attempt to answer profound questions related to the human condition: Where did we come from? Where are we going? What is the meaning of life? Religion can be a quest for salvation, enlightenment, perfection, fulfillment and joy. It can help people cope with or overcome suffering and loss.

All religions encourage people to respect others, to share and to cooperate. Each teaches compassion,



justice and peace. How these ideals are interpreted and practised has resulted in a great variety of religious faiths. Ironically, sometimes differences in religious teachings have also led to conflict and disharmony.

Faith is an essential character of religion. It recognizes a transcendent sacred order and offers ways to deal with the inexplicable elements of human experience in this world and



beyond. Faith touches our senses and innermost feelings. People express faith and spirituality through song, dance and prayer. Religious faith is also reflected in artifacts such as religious art and architecture. Most religions recognize a god, creator or supreme being—a deity or divinity responsible for creating life and the universe. Many religions recognize and worship more than one god. Some people do not practise any religion or believe in any god. Though it is important to recognize that specific beliefs, practices and rituals are different, the ultimate purpose of all faiths is the same—to address the mysteries of existence. Helping students understand others' religions is an important step in helping them understand others' world views, increasing respect and defusing potential conflict. It is also important to recognize that many people who do not practise any religion are moral, ethical and responsible.

DIVERSE THOUGHTS

What Makes Our School Catholic?

By Dawn Duffy

Every year at St Joseph's High School in Grande Prairie, teachers, support staff, administrators and the trustees from across the entire district convene to celebrate the start of a new school year. We are greeted by our superintendent, our ATA local president, the CEP local president and a trustee. Everything—from the mass, choir, readings, altar service, communion and homily—is conducted by an employee of the district. At this meeting, principals introduce new staff, and we all share

plans and hopes for the new school year, and sit together as a community to focus on our faith. Three questions—who are we? what do we say? what do we do?—guide our teaching and interactions with our students throughout the school year. We also hold a Faith Development Day, when the whole district gets together to reflect, discuss and build upon our faith. Then we all go off to our respective schools to bring the hope and faith that we have just celebrated to our students. At least, that's the plan.

High schools are incredibly busy places, and St Joseph's is no exception. We've got important

things to do and lots of other questions to ask in addition to three cited above—questions that relate to the day-to-day running of the school and that deal with student marks and school policies. For example, where did our students place in the province on provincial achievement and diploma exams? What are we doing wrong? What are we doing right? What do we need to improve? How do we keep students in class? Should we amend our attendance policy? What's the latest AISI plan? Who's coaching what? Who's supervising at lunch and how should they do it? The list of questions is lengthy and has little to do directly with faith, but we do have a school to run. At the same time, as a Catholic school we incorporate programs and events that directly address faith. Some of these things are simple, like starting and ending all meetings (staff, IPP or transition, local council and so on) with a prayer.

We have a religious leadership rep at each school, and we celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, the Feast of St Joseph and the end-of-the-year masses together as a school. We also occasionally hold youth rallies, where the district invites someone to sing and celebrate with our students. In the last few years we've hosted both Jesse Manibusan and Steve Angrisano, Catholic

speakers and musicians who are well known throughout the US and Canada for their influential work with young people. We also do things that are so ingrained that we don't even notice them, such as putting up Advent wreaths at Christmas and crucifixes in every classroom. We start each class with a prayer and also have a daily morning prayer for staff, but sometimes we get so caught up with life's little details that our time for prayer and reflection becomes more of a planning session that ends with a prayer. Such is life in a modern Catholic high school.

Every student at St Joe's must complete Religious Studies 15, 25, and 35. These classes are always challenging because we have students from one end of the faith spectrum to the other, though most are somewhere in the middle, and for them religion isn't really any different from other

subjects. The few who are strong in their faith usually keep quiet about it either because they are uncomfortable about publicly professing it or because they worry about being teased. It has never been cool to be the religious kid; "Come to youth group with me" isn't what most teenagers would use as a pick-up line. I have had the opportunity to teach a few classes in which the students had been together for years and found that because they knew each other so well they were more open, honest and respectful with each other. As a consequence, we were able to discuss so many things that I couldn't discuss with my other religion classes, such as gender issues, family/social roles, abortion and birth control. We also watched a documentary that discussed how the Jesus story has similarities with an old Egyptian story about a sun god. When we covered most of these topics in the other classes, the



discussions were a little one-sided, but when the kids knew each other well, we were able to explore the issues and share our different perspectives and ideas in a much deeper way. I always felt as though I'd accomplished something at the end of those classes; that I'd actually got my students to think!

And then there are the students who question faith; some of them could play a role in

the film *Religulous*, an indictment of religion and faith written by US comedian and commentator Bill Maher that played in cinemas in 2008. You might be surprised to learn that these sceptical students are my favourites because they keep asking why and trying to disprove beliefs, and as a teacher I know that it is important for kids to question given truths. At the same time, as a Catholic teacher, I have found that by supporting their questions and helping them find answers they develop a respect for Catholicism. They may not become active members of the Church, but they aren't as dismissive or even scornful of those who do believe. I count that as a success; through investigation those students have learned how to ask good questions, how to think and how to be tolerant of others with whom they might not agree. I should also point out that St Joe's has lesbian and

Teachers and guidance counsellors provide information and advice on many of the complexities of human behaviour. Part of that discussion often includes faith and diversity.

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gay students and sometimes single-mum parents—all these kids are accepted and made to feel welcome at our school, and I believe it is precisely because we encourage tolerance as part of our faith education.

Over the last few years, we have been told that Catholic education is under threat and that we therefore must be more Catholic in our schools, but I believe that it is all too easy to forget what faith is about and to be distracted by how it appears to others. Fortunately, we can ignore most of these external demands when we are in our classrooms. What makes a Catholic school

Catholic isn't the overt signs, such as crucifixes and pictures of saints and the pope; rather, it's how we treat our students with respect, how we pray together and for each other, how we are free to show our students how to use faith to get through difficult times, and how to celebrate the good times. The point of a Catholic school was best said by Saint Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

Dawn Duffy is a member of the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee; she teaches Grades 9–11 at St Joseph Catholic High School, in Grande Prairie, Alberta.

Interfaith Awareness Is Key to Understanding Diversity



By Hope Maurice

The following article appeared in Volume 86, no 3, of the ATA Magazine.

In the ever-growing sea of multiculturalism and religious diversity, the waters can become muddied with stereotypes and intolerance. Today's teens may swim in the same school of fish, but they have bigger worries than acne, what was *in* last week or a broken heart.

Although many teens are accepting and open-minded, not all students are able to go with the flow. Some teens struggle to see beyond what seems different or have difficulty recognizing that they really do share many of the same plights, dreams and interests. Sometimes, a lack of awareness about the benefits and contributions of religion, belief and faith can lead to intolerance.

Fortunately, teachers strive to guide teens through those growing pains and teach them skills to get them through the challenging times. The Alberta

curriculum does a commendable job of preparing teens for graduation, transitions to higher education and the workforce. Teachers and guidance counsellors provide information and advice on many of the complexities of human behaviour. Part of that discussion often includes faith and diversity.

With today's pluralism, some teachers may face challenges of religious and cultural discord in the classroom or school community. With the assistance of interfaith and cultural groups, which strive to create environments of positive change through understanding and acceptance, a new initiative has been created to provide resources for teachers and students.

Through funding from Canadian Heritage, the Meeting the Intercultural Challenge in Schools Project: Respect for Faith and Diversity (the Project) was established in partnership with the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for

Education and Action, and the United Nations Association in Canada, Edmonton Branch. The purpose of the Project is to increase awareness and understanding of cross-cultural and inter-religious diversity, providing assistance to teachers and students alike.

The objective is to help students become more accepting and open-minded people who are able to see that their differences are as important as the things they share in common. Students are encouraged to learn from one another by focusing on the strengths and assets each possesses.

Interfaith awareness can be a key strategy to help address misguided views, half-truths and stereotypes.

Learning about ethnocultural topics and various religions in our pluralist society helps teens comprehend various traits that are inherent to human behaviour. The Project provides tools and interactive resources to help teachers and students work together to create positive interactions in the school and community.

Teacher and student resources are available

Teaching tools and interactive resources are available on the Project's website www.ibelievein.ca. Under the Teachers page, find links to lesson plans for elementary, junior high and high school levels, links to educational resources and interfaith websites, a PowerPoint presentation that can be customized for use in schools, and a multimedia video created for teens that highlights interfaith concepts. The video is specifically designed to appeal to students and there are a series of discussion questions suggested

on the site to help encourage dialogue within the classroom. There are downloadable PDF files of two posters and the Project brochure.

By providing teens with practical strategies within schools, the Project hopes to achieve increased awareness in inter-religious and multicultural understanding through dialogue, cooperation and sharing knowledge.

Informed students are more able to appreciate, respect and recognize the values and contributions of their peers, neighbours and community members. When these concepts are encouraged to flow conscientiously on the path to maturity, youth are more able to absorb the richness of life's tapestries woven from myriad thoughts, ideals, goals and pledges of the world's citizens.

Young adults who understand the benefits of religious diversity and multiple world views are more likely to work collaboratively and creatively to find solutions to life's complexities. Considering the points of view of people who have particular perspectives of the world allows teens to think outside the mainstream.

The Safe and Caring Schools for Students of All Faiths teachers' guide developed by the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, helps educators reinforce the concept of religion, faith or belief in daily life. Religion contributes to the way a person dresses, eats, talks and walks. Students need to understand the many aspects of religion to better understand the world around them. Awareness in the area of faith and culture helps teens grow as people and strengthens their relationships. The booklet provides ideas on conflict resolution, critical thinking, character education, encouraging dialogue and bias awareness.

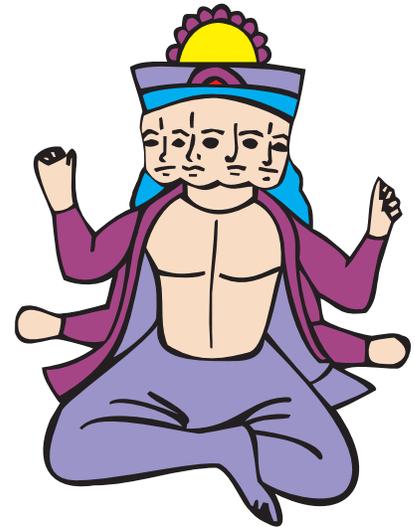
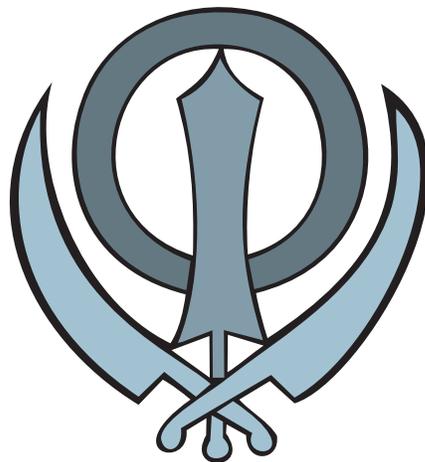


Bill 44

Early in the spring of 2009, the Alberta government introduced Bill 44, which amended Alberta's *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* by requiring that advance notice be given to parents about instruction on religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. Teachers accused of violating the terms of the bill could conceivably be hauled in front of a human rights tribunal. Many groups saw this as provocative and unnecessary legislation, and some suggested that the bill was introduced as a sop to certain conservative pressure groups in the province. The bill certainly succeeded in raising many eyebrows and hackles across the province, inspiring many letters to the editor, and uniting the ATA, the Alberta School Boards Association and the College of Superintendents, all of whom vocally opposed the bill.

Why do we need Bill 44?

The *School Act*, section 50, already has a provision for students to be exempt from religious or patriotic instruction or exercises. The onus is on parents to provide a written request to the teacher that the student be excluded from the particular subject matter. In most cases, it should be sufficient for the board to provide notice to the parents in the form of a course outline or syllabus identifying the materials or program that deal explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.



Teachers' obligations

Teachers have an obligation under the *School Act*, section 18, to "teach the courses of study and education programs that are prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act" and to "encourage and foster learning in students." Parents who provide notice that they want their child excused from explicit instruction on religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation must have their wishes honoured.

Teachers who provide instruction in courses dealing with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation are advised to review the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12*, which includes information on teaching controversial issues. The guide states:

Studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Such study provides opportunities to develop the ability to think clearly, to reason logically, to open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view and to make sound judgements. ...

Controversial issues that have been anticipated by the teacher, and those that may arise incidentally during instruction, should be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry and/or to teach thinking skills.

Teachers who have questions about how Bill 44 will be implemented in their school division should seek clarification from their principal. If a parent complains about a teacher's instruction, the teacher should contact ATA Member Services in Edmonton or Calgary immediately. The Association will ensure that teachers are represented in the face of any such complaint.

A Teacher's Take on Bill 44

Bill 44 in a Catholic School

—Lynn Smarsh

Since 1888, the Edmonton Catholic School District has been a publicly funded faith-based school district. How fortunate we are to live in a province that was brought into confederation with two types of publicly funded school systems—public and separate, both of which follow Alberta Education curriculum.

At Edmonton Catholic Schools (ECS), we meet the academic needs of students by integrating education with faith, life and culture. Students are encouraged to discern and develop their God-given talents to reach academic success. All children in our schools are required to take religious studies courses and participate in all religious celebrations. In today's Catholic schools, there are many students of various faiths receiving a quality Catholic education.

Recently, the Alberta government passed Bill 44, which amended the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* and could affect how teachers work in the classroom. Here is the text of the bill in question:

Bill 44 section 11 reads:

Notice to parent or guardian

11.1(1) A board as defined in the *School Act* shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.

(2) Where a teacher or other person providing instruction, teaching a course of study or educational program or using the instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) receives a written request signed by a parent or guardian of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional materials, the teacher or other person shall in accordance with the request of the parent or guardian and without academic penalty permit the student

(a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction, course of study or educational program is taking place or the instructional materials are being used for the duration of the part of the instruction, course of study or educational program, or the use of the instructional materials, that includes the subject-matter referred to in subsection (1)

or

(b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction, course of study or educational program or using the instructional materials.

Will Bill 44 make a difference in Catholic school classrooms? This question was put to Sandy Gillis, president of the Edmonton Catholic Teachers' local no 54 at the council meeting on June 2, 2009. Gillis said that the first challenges to the school boards would probably not be from the Catholic system but from the public. Because parents in the Catholic system sign an agreement about religious education when their kids enter the

school system, it is unlikely that parents would act on the religious clause.

Superintendent Joan Carr and Edmonton Catholic Schools hope to hear from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association so that all Catholic boards will use the same interpretation. ECS spokesperson Lori Nagy said that the ECS will review the new wording of the act in a Catholic context to see how it might affect Catholic education.

And what about the effect of Bill 44 on science classes? The following response came from Kevin Engel, department head of sciences at Edmonton's St Joseph High School:

This is the bone of contention. As both a teacher and parent, I always knew that a mechanism already existed for a parent to find out what was being taught to their child, and that they could pull their child from class whenever they wanted; they would then depend on the professionalism of the teacher and school to



It is a blessing that children are far more accepting of each other and respectful of difference than some adults are.

—Lynn Smarsh

not penalize the child. While this never has happened to me as a teacher or parent, I know that it has with others. So I guess my first reaction to Bill 44 is, why do we need it in the *Human Rights Act*?

I also have a concern regarding the human sexuality and evolution taught in high school biology. That material is tested on standardized government tests throughout Alberta, not the least of which is the Biology 30 diploma exam. All students need to learn that type of material to maximize their chances on the exam, which has large implications for their postsecondary acceptance. Will Bill 44 encourage parents to use the opt-out clause in large numbers, thereby affecting the diploma results of significant numbers of students? Will their scores be significantly lower? The answer to that question is unknown.

Why do we need an amendment to the *Human Rights Act*? The original intent of the bill is now clouded. The bill was meant to amend the human rights legislation of Alberta to be in line with the rest of Canada and to include a statement of support for all families, no matter their circumstances. However, with the addition of Section 11, parents may be endangering the education of their children.

Section 11 also refers to sexual orientation, and this puts many Catholic educators ill at ease. How do we treat our fellow teachers and parents who have a different sexual orientation? How do we react to our students when they are questioning their own orientation? Will Bill 44 make a difference in how we teach our classes? It gives one pause to consider the many questions that inform our practice. In a Catholic school, we strive to respect all people regardless of any differences they have from the norm. It is a blessing that children are far more accepting of each other and respectful of difference than some adults are. The new Canada has many faces and ways of living and there is no room for intolerance. The more we learn from each other, the stronger a country we will be.

Let me be perfectly clear— the minister responds

The passage of Bill 44 caused a firestorm of protest across the province. Alberta's phlegmatic education minister, Dave Hancock, was quick to

respond. Below are some excerpts from his website.

Let's be perfectly clear right from the start. Alberta is not turning back the clock! Alberta students will continue to take a full robust curriculum examining all aspects of modern science, including biology, chemistry and physics. Bill 44 (the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act*) is not a get-out-of-class-free card for anyone who finds molecular biology difficult. Geology is not religion—even if you claim to worship rocks. Bill 44 simply continues the current law and practice in Alberta where parents are entitled to know when their children study religion and sex ed, or sexuality. ...

Some argue that by putting these provisions into the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* there is a significant change—elevating them to the status of “rights.” Surprise! These already are rights. Parents have the right to know what their children are being taught. They have the right to review curriculum with teachers—and in fact are encouraged to do so. ...

... there is particular sensitivity about specifically teaching about religion and religious doctrine. While I want my children to understand the spectrum of religions in the world, I may not

want you to interpret for my child what the doctrines of my religion are. ... It is for these reasons that notification is provided to parents, and the opportunity is there for a parent to say, “I would rather my child does not participate.”

Simply put, Bill 44 is not about making false choices—tolerance or intolerance, ignorance or intelligence, Darwin or Jesus—but about parents' awareness of what is taught in religious or human sexuality classes. Instruction about religion and human sexuality have always been areas of sensitivity for some parents. Parents have always had the right to exempt their children from instruction in these areas. Parental rights include being informed about and given the chance to opt out of explicit religious instruction and exercises, and instruction about human sexuality. Parental rights do not include allowing religious interpretation of the broader program of studies as grounds for opting out.



Faith or microscopes

Mr Hancock goes on to say;

Public education in Alberta will unequivocally continue to include evolution. ... Teachers are required to teach the programs of study, and therefore are required to teach evolution when it arises in the programs of study. Evolution is presented as a widely accepted scientific theory on origins based on many well-tested lines of evidence. ... Science looks at how the world is; religion is one way of understanding what the world means. Science programs may include discussion of other explanations of origins, including creationism, but these explanations will not be given equal time and emphasis, or recognition as scientific theories. Teachers are expected to respect students' religious beliefs and allow them to express views based on their personal values and beliefs. ...

A cohesive, pluralistic society requires informed citizens who understand both science and religion, even if some of these citizens choose not to believe in aspects of one or the other. While not all students take courses specifically about religion, topics related to religion may be explored in other programs of study, like social studies. Bill 44 will not change that. Students should be learning about beliefs they do not necessarily agree with, whether scientific or religious. Thinking through personal beliefs is an important part of developing judgment and character. Some parents prefer to rely on religious traditions like prayer to develop character.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission is not there to take teachers and school boards to task for failing to inform parents. Its role is significantly more important than that. This concept that teachers will have to fear any utterance—that discussion in class will “freeze,” that there can be no utilization of “teachable moments” when a topic touches on religion or homosexuality—is bizarre. Social studies classrooms must and will be able to discuss current events—even when, especially when, they involve a clash of cultures, values and even religions. That is not teaching religion—that is acknowledging the reality of today's society and developing students who are global citizens. ...

Should these changes be in the *School Act* rather than the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*? Probably. That is certainly my view. The *School Act* is where one would expect to look for school-related matters. However, some argue that rights should be

reflected in the act which deals with human rights. Which piece of legislation it is included in does not change the fact that parents are ultimately responsible for their children, that society has an interest in making sure children are appropriately educated, and that in some areas there is inevitably going to be a clash of values that needs rational discussion and resolution.

For more, go to the minister's website at www.davehancock.ca/2009/05/the-origin-of-the-specious.html

Lynn Smarsh teaches ELL at St Joseph High School, in Edmonton, and is a member of the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee.

Postscript—Bill 44 implementation delayed

Although Bill 44 passed third reading and was given royal assent in June, it does not come into effect until it is proclaimed by an order of provincial cabinet. Culture and Community Spirit Minister Lindsay Blackett unilaterally declared earlier this month that he would proceed with proclamation in October or November; however, Minister of Education Dave Hancock has since called upon his colleague to further delay proclamation of those sections of the bill that would affect education.

Hancock's request is consistent with the advice provided by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association that section 9 not be brought into effect before more explicit direction can be provided to teachers and boards about its interpretation and implementation and, preferably, not in the middle of the school year. This would effectively delay proclamation until September 2010. In the interim, other sections of the bill could be proclaimed separately.

Among the issues under consideration is the exact meaning of *primarily and explicitly* within the context of section 9 and, therefore, what curriculum content, resources and instructional practices might be deemed as dealing primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. In addition, it will be necessary to determine what would constitute adequate notice to parents and what, if any, alternative processes might be established to forestall the need for parents to take their complaints to the human rights commission.

A cohesive, pluralistic society requires informed citizens who understand both science and religion, even if some of these citizens choose not to believe in aspects of one or the other.

—Education Minister Dave Hancock

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ATA Staff Officer and DEHR Committee Member Honoured

Barb Maheu, recently retired staff officer in Professional Development and former secretary to the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee, was recently awarded the Sheryl McInnis Award, which recognizes a person who, through long-term scholarship, teaching and/or academic pursuit, has enriched the LGBTQ community.

Maheu counts herself as one of the fortunate few teachers who had a career opportunity that involved her in bringing about greater equality for sexual minority teachers and students.

In her acceptance speech she noted that “ten years ago the Alberta Teachers’ Association initiated policies designed to protect students and teachers from discrimination based on sexual orientation in schools. The Association has since developed extensive policies that include gender identity; we also have programs, promotions and activities that reflect those policies. It has been heartening to watch teachers respond to what was once a controversial or unmentionable issue—identifying sexual minorities and recognizing that they were most often silenced and invisible in our schools—to a place where we do what we can to address homophobia and transphobia. I was in the privileged position to be able to help foster the Association’s work along with the dedicated members of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Subcommittee, one of the most active, passionate and action-oriented groups in the Association. It is because of the strong advocacy of all subcommittee members that we have been able to make significant progress to help teachers and school administrators address the unique needs of sexual minorities. This does not mean that we are there yet. There is still much work to do, but rest assured—the Alberta Teachers’ Association has picked up the challenge and will continue to do so. I am really accepting the award on behalf of the Association. Thank you.”

Teaching Tolerance Magazine

The *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, which is published by the Southern Poverty Law Center to accompany its free Teaching Tolerance educational program, is available online on the website dedicated to the Teaching Tolerance program. The magazine features information and creative ways to teach tolerance. To access, click Go on the right side of the page, www.tolerance.org/teach/magazine/index.jsp. At the end of each article is a resource list of all the materials mentioned in the article. If the thoughtful content and depth with which the Southern Poverty Law Center supports its Teaching Tolerance program isn’t enough to convince visitors that it’s a superb program, check out this quote from their About Us section: “Scientific surveys demonstrate that our programs help students learn respect for differences and bolster teacher practice.”

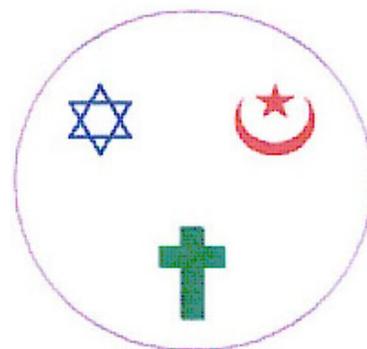
Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action

The Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action is a unique cooperative of faiths working together for a common purpose. The faiths represented are Aboriginal, Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Eckankar, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Scientology, Taoist, Unitarian and Zoroastrian.

www.edminterfaithcentre.ca

Walking Together: A Program to Teach Religious Diversity from the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action

Walking Together is a program for Grade 7 students and their parents. Its aim is to teach appreciation of the religious and other differences of people in the community. The program also aims to create positive relationships between adults and children from different religious expressions, and between parents and children as they learn the importance of tolerance and understanding.



Why is Walking Together needed?

One of the most important unmet needs of children in Canada is the teaching of empathy, appreciation and understanding of ethnic, racial, sexual, gender and religious differences among members of the community. This lack of understanding and tolerance can lead to violent acts and hate crimes. **Walking Together** focuses on the values of appreciation and respect, creating positive reinforcement and tools to help students avoid the pitfalls of intolerance and hatred as they reach their teen years.

Walking Together is hosted in churches, synagogues and mosques throughout the community. The entire program lasts nine hours and is divided into three three-hour sessions, usually held over three weeks.

For more information on **Walking Together**, contact the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. Tel: 780-413-6159; website: www.edminterfaithcentre.ca.

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities Faith Workshops

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SACSC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to violence prevention and character education for children and youth. SACSC offers many programs, resources and

workshops to help adults create safe spaces for youth.

All SACSC work is based on the following ideals:

- Nonviolent behaviours must be taught and reinforced consistently by the important adults in a child's life.
- Children and youth learn more effectively when they feel safe and cared for.
- Children and youth are the responsibility of all adults in a community.

SACSC Faith-Related Publications and Workshops

Safe and Caring Schools for Arab and Muslim Students—A Guide for Teachers

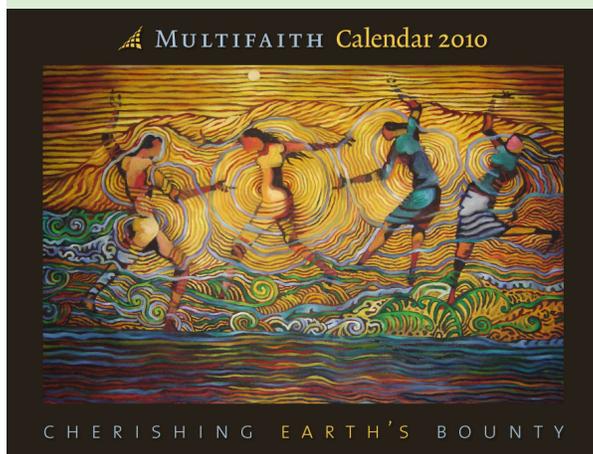
This guide provides teachers with suggestions on dealing with issues that affect Arab and Muslim students, and basic information on Arab culture and the Muslim faith. The guide also lists strategies teachers that can implement to counter the harmful effects of stereotyping and discrimination.

Safe and Caring Schools for Students of All Faiths—A Guide for Teachers

This guide provides teachers with suggestions on how to help students respect religious diversity and appreciate each other's world views and customs.

Hard copies of both booklets are available from the SACSC office at 780-447-9487.

The Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action's multifaith calendar provides information on 140 religious and cultural occasions and insights into 14 major world faiths.



This year's theme is Cherishing Earth's Bounty. The cover depicts Dance of Thanksgiving by Bert Monterona, a Filipino artist living in Vancouver, who has organized art workshops in schools and communities, and who pursues a lifelong passion of working for peace and understanding between people.

According to Monterona, "Indigenous people in different countries are always interconnected with rituals, asking or thanking the Supreme Being in the form of chants, music and dance. The Dance of Thanksgiving is inspired by Canada's Thanksgiving Day. I believe that art as ritual

has healing capacity and that the artist as healer has valuable contributions to balancing the mind and the planet."

To obtain a multifaith calendar, contact the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. Tel: 780-413-6159; e-mail: intfaith@shaw.ca.

North American Interfaith Network

The North American Interfaith Network is a nonprofit association of interfaith organizations and agencies in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

www.nain.org/

Parliament of the World's Religions

The Parliament of the World's Religions was created to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities, and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world in which

- religious and spiritual communities live harmoniously,
- understanding and respect replace religious and cultural fears and hatreds,
- the richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, social and global life,



- the world's most powerful and influential institutions work towards the common good,
- the earth and all life are cherished, protected and restored, and
- all people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations.

www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm

(See information under Notice and Events about the upcoming conference in Melbourne, Australia.)

NOTICES AND EVENTS

October 10–11, 2009: St Mary's College of California, Moraga, California. Visual Literacy and Faith- Based Education Conference.

An interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary conference on issues related to visual literacy and faith-based colleges and universities. For more information, contact Anna Novakov at the Center for Creative Pedagogy.

<http://creativepedagogy.ning.com>

October 16–18, 2009: Canmore, Alberta. Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association annual conference.

Theme: The Journey to Meaning, to Belonging, to Justice.

For more information, go to <http://rmec.teachers.ab.ca/Pages/Home.aspx>

October 22–24, 2009: Toronto, Ont.

Conference sponsored in part by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA),

the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) and the Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario (CARFLEO). Theme: When Faith Meets Pedagogy XIV Conference: Voices that Challenge.

For more information, go to www.catholiccurriculumcorp.org/wfmp/XIVProgram.pdf

November 9–15, 2009: McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. Eighth annual conference on peace education.

Theme: Loving Teachers, Living Schools: Sharing Our Paths of Peace. Hosted by the Canadian Centres for Teaching Peace and McMaster University Centre for Peace Studies.

www.schoolpeaceprogram.org/2009-conference

December 3–9, 2009: Melbourne, Australia. Parliament of the World's Religions annual conference.

www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm

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