

Good Evening to the members of the board. My name is Fr Michael Simoes and I am a priest of the Archdiocese of Toronto and currently the pastor of St. Mary Star of the Sea in Mississauga. As a priest for the Archdiocese, His Eminence, Thomas Cardinal Collins has also appointed me as the chaplain for the Toronto Chapter of Courage, a group of fellowship and spiritual support for adult (21+) Catholic men and women who experience same-sex attraction and are looking for some accompaniment to help them live their faith fully. Before I was ordained a priest, I had the privilege of going through Catholic Education in Toronto at Prince of Peace Catholic Elementary School and Francis Libermann Catholic High School. When Catholic Education week rolls along each year, I give thanks for this privilege and for the education that I received in TCDSB.

However, I come to you this evening with a heaviness in my heart. I and the men and women who I minister to in the Courage ministry would be deeply saddened to see the Pride flag raised at our Catholic schools. We might feel that it is necessary to raise the flag to stop bullying or discrimination. While these are good intentions, if you vote yes to the Pride flag you will be fatally undermining the mission of the TCDSB.

Why? Because while we might feel that by raising the pride flag that we are being welcoming, inclusive, and supporting persons who are suffering with same-sex attraction and other sexual identities, our hearts sometimes can deceive us. As one Courage member related to me when this was brought up, “the Pride flag is a lie. It’s not about diversity, inclusion and acceptance. It’s about conformity, exclusion and intolerance. Everywhere it’s raised, traditional beliefs about life and family are compromised and eventually suppressed. And the brave souls who defend those beliefs are vilified, hounded and marginalized.”

Other secular institutions that are raising the flag are not allowed to express a particular faith, but in Catholic Schools we are. And the faith that we express is that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. We believe in a God who is love and demonstrated love by dying on the cross. The Cross from which Jesus hung is the firm point in the midst of the world’s changes. While all sorts of ideologies spring up, the cross of Christ which we hang in our classrooms and display on the exterior of our schools is ever relevant and reveals the love that God has for all people no matter who they are and desires to gather to Himself in his family. The Cross is the sign of true love and mercy. The Gospel really is Good News, a declaration of freedom and hope, a hope that we are to nurture...a hope in the Lord as our strength. An authentic Catholic education is an incredibly precious gift for our children and young people – including those labelled “LGBTQ”.

To our trustees, I beg you: please search your hearts and pray for strength. Vote to keep the Pride flag out of our Catholic schools. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Have Mercy on us.