



May 18, 2021

To: Trustees and Student Trustees
Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)

Dear Trustees and Student Trustees,

I am Vincent Pham, a University of Toronto undergraduate student, recently completed second-year of studies, and pursuing a double-major in Ethics, Society and Law, Philosophy as well as a minor in Christianity and Culture. I am proud alumnus of the TCDSB, from Chaminade College School (class of 2019). In response to Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto's pastoral letter, *Heart Speaks to Heart*, dated April 18, 2021 as well as after much prayer and discernment, I am writing this letter to convey my support for a motion that June shall be dedicated and proclaimed the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in all TCDSB schools.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt 11:28-29) Every one of us are called to come to the Heart of Jesus in both the ups and downs of life. As Cardinal Collins recognized in his pastoral letter, this is ever so true particularly during this time of pandemic (HSH 1). It is by being close and having an encounter with this Heart that we come to imitate and learn from the One whom we call Teacher, Messiah, Son of God, Jesus Christ – true God and true Man.

In well developed countries such as Canada or the United States, people are being driven ever so quickly to materialism and consumerism. Social media, particularly, creates for society an image of a life that is so materialistic, that chases haves 'likes,' views or heart emojis. However, for Catholics, for believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we know that earthly materials do not bring us a true "rest." We are restless because as St. Augustine has said in his Confessions, "[God], you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." Society looks for a sense of rest in materialism, but that never totally satisfies one. It is only when one truly finds refuge in Jesus Christ, by His heart that we find a totally sense of peace, a peace that many saints who once chased after materialism or personal glory like St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola experienced.

These two points lay the foundation to why the TCDSB should proclaim June to be the month of Sacred Heart. Not only is the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart celebrated on the Friday after the Solemnity of Corpus Christi which happens to fall in June, but more so to emphasize two things. First, our identity as a Catholic School. Being a Catholic School or Catholic Board should not merely be a title. In a world where a relativistic culture seems to challenge the Church's views and teachings, we know that the Catholic Church follows only one morality, one truth and that is in Jesus Christ, whom we believe to be the Way, Truth and Life (cf. Jn 14:6) To proclaim June as the month of the Sacred Heart distinguishes us from the secular world – it shows that our schools and board are under one banner, and that is the banner of Jesus' heart, the heart

filled with love and mercy for every single person, no matter who they are, even if they are seemingly excluded from society. This concept of inclusivity I noticed, have been a topic of great concern for members of the TCDSB, and thus, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the most perfect devotion that speaks to inclusivity, this universality of God's great love for everyone.

Secondly, to proclaim the month of June as the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus provides an opportunity for application of Church devotion into the lives of students in Catholic schools. The Sacred Heart is not merely a title, a devotion in the Church, but it is something living in the Church that requires of us to open our own hearts to have this encounter with our Lord. How often in Religion courses do students merely learn about the Catechism but are not able to apply it into their own lives? Catholic Theology must not be a regurgitation of facts from the Catechism, but it is a living faith. Since it is a living faith, we encounter then, a living person, Jesus Christ whose heart we are called to conform to. This encounter with the Lord Jesus is the most important thing in Catholic schools, and unfortunately this is ever so often forgotten.

The true encounter and warmth of the heart of Jesus is not something of warm fuzzy feelings. No, it is not about feelings as today's society sees it. "Mom buys me the newest iPhone – I feel mom's love, I feel God's love." But when a newer iPhone comes out, that love fades away, but instead an urge to follow the newest phone takes its place. Yet, Jesus' heart never goes out of date. This living story of 2000-years shows that a true encounter with Jesus is not one of feelings, but one of an objective way, an objective truth to the point of suffering, self-giving. It is in the little sacrifices, that giving of one's own wants and desires for the good of another is when we have a true living encounter with the Lord Jesus. This in itself is an extension of the Eucharistic Celebration that we have in Catholic schools and every day in churches all over the world – that mystery of bread and wine transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ, a living being who shed His blood for the salvation of all through His passion so that we might have life. The Sacred Heart of Jesus sums all of this up beautifully, providing a platform for people to truly reflect on what it means to have an encounter with Jesus.

The TCDSB has many cultural heritage months, celebrating the diversity of staff and students in our Catholic schools. While that is beautiful, what would even more beautiful and much more meaningful is to culminate all of this in the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose love encompasses every one of God's children. To celebrate the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to once again remind us of who we really are as Catholics – we are a people of sacrifice, we are a people of encounter, we are a people who bear on ourselves that mark of salvation – this path alone do we follow, because we know that in Jesus Christ alone is our only hope (cf. Tit 2:11-14), and this is what we want to exemplify and be the model for our Catholic schools.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vincent', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vincent Pham