

## Office of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Resurrecting a request that I made seven months ago, on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, I asked Calgary Catholic School Trustees to put an end to the manipulation involved in the recruitment of workers and morally problematic casino and bingo fundraising ventures sooner rather than later.

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006, the Board accepted a Task Force Report on School Based Fundraising. One of the recommendations is: "That Board policy permit school communities to continue to make their own decisions on fundraising methods, utilizing guidelines and accountability structures, developed by the District in consultation with school councils and school principals."

The acceptance of the Task Force's recommendations constitutes a failure in Catholic leadership, pays lip-service to the pillar of "Catholicity," and is equivalent to Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage (cf. Gen.25: 29-34).

The reasoning behind the acceptance of the recommendations is seriously flawed and based on a series of half-truths. The Trustees assert that "it is our moral and legal right and responsibility to make policy decisions that govern the operation of the School district, including those decisions affecting school-based fundraising." The statement is correct but incomplete.

The Trustees are not a parallel magisterium but accountable to the magisterium. They are not an official teaching body within the Catholic community on faith and morals. As Catholic Trustees, they have to do more than merely "understand where the bishop is coming from."

The Code of Canon Law in 803 #3 states: "Even if it really be Catholic no school may bear the title Catholic school without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority." A Catholic school is an instrument of the Church and is one in which Catholic education is established, directed, recognized or consented to, by the local bishop, who is competent to issue prescriptions dealing with the general regulation of Catholic schools (Cf. Canon 806#1).

A Catholic school is one in which all instruction and education is grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine, subject to the authority of the Catholic Church. This dimension of accountability has not been adequately acknowledged by Administration and Trustees.

Their methodology featuring "the round-table" was also wrong. Morality is not determined by a straw-vote, participation was not inclusive of the whole Catholic community, and given the so-called "neutrality" of the trustees, the outcome was predetermined. My objections to the methodology were not considered significant.

It is true, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that gambling is not intrinsically wrong when viewed from the vantage point of the individual engaging in games of chance or making modest wagers provided certain conditions are fulfilled.

However, the Catechism does not address the more profound questions associated with an elaborate system of gambling and a Catholic institution's responsibility.

In addition to being unabashedly materialistic, the gambling industry is attempting to sanitize its operation by suggesting that it is only harmless entertainment or "gaming," and ignoring the fact that the whole industry is based on greed and leaves a whole host of people, not only gambling addicts, damaged in its wake. For a Catholic, people are not just regrettable statistical casualties.

Gambling constitutes an unfair form of taxation in that it is regressive, unrelated to income or property, and drawn disproportionately from low-income people.

Although it is true that individuals are not forced to participate in gambling, studies indicate that gambling attracts a disproportionate number of welfare recipients, pensioners, and working poor. It is morally wrong for a Catholic institution to formally cooperate in an industry that exploits the weak and vulnerable. The end does not justify the means.

The Administration and Trustees have failed to appreciate the power of their witness to the very constituency that they profess to serve, i.e. our youth, and their responsibility to model behaviour. Their background research should have looked at gambling as a family policy issue and the problem of significant increase of student gambling. (Cf. Contemporary Family Trends, "Gambling with our (Kids') Futures" <http://www.vifamily.ca/library/cft/gambling.html>).

The School Board, the individual schools, and related parent councils and societies must get out of bingo and casino gambling fundraising activities. There is no question as to "what" has to be done but there is room to negotiate "how" and "when."

Given the importance of the outstanding issues, and my disagreement with the Board's conclusions, I will not be presiding at the opening of the year Calgary Catholic District School liturgy. If satisfactory solutions are not found, other consequences will also be forthcoming in September including the black-listing of schools that engage in immoral fund-raising.

Wishing you all the best, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. B. Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ F. B. Henry  
Bishop of Calgary.

June 20, 2006